

FIFTY TWO
SERMONS

FOR EVERY
SUNDAY *of the* YEAR

M DCC XXVII.

Preached out of the First LESSONS at *Morning Prayer.*

By WILLIAM READING, M. A.

Keeper of the LIBRARY at *Sion-College.*

V O L. II.

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L O N D O N :

Printed by J. WATTS, for the AUTHOR.

M DCC XXVIII.

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MEMORIALS

FOR EVERY

SUNDAY YEAR



MEMORIALS

OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

VOLUME

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MDCCXCVII

THE TEXTS

Of the SECOND VOLUME.

SERMON XXVII. On the Fifth Sunday after TRINITY.

1 Sam. xv. 22. *And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in Burnt-offerings and Sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than Sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of Rams.* Page 345

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2 Sam. xii. 13. *And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.* P. 359

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2 Sam. xxi. 1. *Then there was a Famine in the days of David, three years, year after year: And David enquired of the Lord; and the Lord answered, It is for Saul and for his bloody House, because he slew the Gibeonites.* P. 373

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Bethel, and Jeroboam stood by the Altar to burn Incense. P. 388

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- 1 Kings xviii. 17, 18. *And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah, that he said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy Father's House, in that ye have forsaken the Commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.* P. 403

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- 1 Kings xxi. 28, 29. *And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the Evil in his days; but in his Son's days will I bring the Evil upon his House.* P. 416

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- 2 Kings v. 18. *In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my Master goeth into the House of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the House of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the House of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.* P. 430

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- 2 Kings x. 31. *But Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his Heart: for he departed not from the Sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to Sin.* P. 443

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2 Kings xix. 37. *And it came to pass as he was worshipping in the House of Nisroch his God, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his Sons smote him with the Sword: And they escaped into the Land of Armenia; and Esarhaddon his Son reigned in his stead.* P. 456

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Lambs, or of He-Goats.* p. 626

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song of my well-beloved touching his Vineyard: my
well-beloved hath a Vineyard in a very fruitful Hill.
And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof,
and planted it with the choicest Vine, and built a
Tower in the midst of it, and also made a Winepress
therein: and he looked that it should bring forth
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this; their strength is to sit still.* p. 662

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SERMON XXVII.

On the Fifth Sunday after TRINITY.



I SAMUEL xv. 22.

And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in Burnt-offerings and Sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than Sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of Rams.



WE have lately seen how the People of *Israel* offended God by rejecting his Government of them, and demanding a King after the fashion of the Nations round about them: We shall now see how the King which God gave them, displeased him, by not punctually fulfilling his word, in a matter which he commanded him to execute.

FOR though Kings have the supreme authority among Men, yet God, who is higher than

the Highest, reigns over all, and did not abandon the care of his People, nor cease to direct them in their affairs, when he set up *Saul* at the Head of them: But he covenanted with this Sovereign Prince to bless him and to prosper him, upon condition that he would always obey the Divine Will, which should be communicated to him either by his established Law contained in the writings of *Moses*, or by new Revelations and Messages which he would send him by his Prophets, or by the Oracle of the Sanctuary, which, in failure of the two former, the Priest should consult for him.

Now here we are informed in the History before us, how God sent the Prophet *Samuel* to *Saul*, commanding him to levy War against the *Amalekites*, who had given this occasion for it. They were a branch of the *Edomites*, *Amalek* their founder being descended from the eldest Son of *Esau*, as we read *Genesis xxxvi.* and consequently they inhabited part of *Idumæa* by the wilderness of *Paran*, near the way by which *Israel* came out of *Egypt*.

AND in the second month of their coming out of *Egypt*, when they were in hard circumstances, as being in a barren Wilderness, and Strangers in it, these *Amalekites* gathered a great Army, and came out of their own Territory, and fell suddenly upon the poor *Israelites*, at a place called *Rephidim*, attacking them chiefly in the rear, and slaying such as through faintness and weakness could not keep up with the main body of the People. But *Israel*, by the prayers of *Moses* their Prophet, and the valiant conduct of *Joshua* their Captain, obtained a compleat victory over them.

OF this Battel God commands *Moses* to make a particular Record, *Exod. xvii. 14.* declaring with an Oath that he would have continual War with the

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the *Amalekites*, until in process of time their name should be utterly rooted out from under Heaven. This sentence is repeated and enforced, *Deut. xxv. 17.* And the justice of it is vindicated by these Reasons.

1. BECAUSE the *Amalekites* were the first that drew sword against *Israel*; and that unprovoked; for the *Israelites* did not offer to pass through their Country, and consequently gave them no apprehensions of an Invasion: And that which made it more barbarous to assault them at this time, was, that they were but just delivered from grievous oppression, and had not yet been accustomed to war. 2. The *Amalekites* were not only causeless aggressors, but they invaded *Israel* by treachery and surprize, without any notice or declaration of war. 3. They did not offer *Israel* fair battel, but fell upon them like wild beasts, cutting off such as through feebleness or accident were separated from their company, and in no condition to resist them. 4. By this outrage they shewed their great contempt of God, who had done such wonderful things for *Israel* in *Egypt*, and brought them thence with a mighty hand, and overthrew *Pharaoh* in the Red-Sea when he pursued them. These and many more instances of the Divine Favour towards *Israel*, *Amalek* must needs have heard of, together with what God farther intended to do for them; and therefore their assaulting them in their first setting out for *Canaan*, and second month of deliverance from *Egypt*, was a hardy defiance of their Divine Guide and Protector.

WE see that *Amalek*, out of meer malice, and even in despite of God, attempted to cut off *Israel* root and branch; and therefore it was but just with God, their King, to have war with the *Amalekites* 'till he had destroyed them, and so to

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retaliate their mischievous designs upon their own heads.

THIS was the ground of God's commission to *Saul*, Go, says he, and smite *Amalek*, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not: But slay both Man and Woman, Infant and Suckling, Ox and Sheep, Camel and Ass. All this *Saul* undertook to perform, and raising an Army of two hundred and ten thousand Soldiers, he made a sudden descent upon *Amalek*, and partly by Sieges, partly by pitch'd Battels, in a short time he destroyed their whole Country. But being too much a Libertine in his Principles of Religion, and not scrupling to change the Sacred Text with his own Comment upon it, his fancy led him to spare *Agag* the King of the *Amalekites*; his example herein was quickly followed by the Soldiers, who made Prey of the Enemies fattest Cattle, and richest Goods, and burnt only those things which were of smallest value.

BUT God was highly displeased, that both King and People had so shamefully transgressed that Law which he had so solemnly enacted many hundred years before, and so express a Message which he sent by *Samuel* for the present execution of it. And indeed his displeasure is very just. For even earthly Kings and Commanders will not endure, that those who are under their Authority, should use their own pleasure in the execution of their Orders. This very King *Saul*, but a little before this, would have put his brave Son *Jonathan* to death, had not the Army withstood it, only for tasting a little Honey contrary to the royal command, which *Jonathan* had never heard of, and therefore was not properly an Offender against it.

BEHOLD here the Pride and Impiety of man's Heart; full of resentment, if his own unreasonable will

will be not done in all things; and quite negligent and forgetful of the holy will of God. Whereby he plainly honours himself far above his Maker, and arrogates to himself a far greater share in the Government of the World. Every one, he expects, should pay a deference and regard to his Word, when at the same time he pays little or no reverence to that of the most High.

FOR this cause God told the Prophet *Samuel*, that he repented he had made *Saul* King, considering how little he hearkened to God, and how much he governed himself by his own Lusts. When *Samuel* heard this, he was much troubled, and spent a whole night in Prayer to God, that he would turn from the fierceness of his Wrath, and be favourable to King *Saul*: But God, who knew this King's Heart, declared that he was not worthy of his Grace and Favour.

FOR of the fault which he had now committed, he seems to have no manner of Sense nor Conscience. When *Samuel* next morning waited on him at *Gilgal*, *Saul* told him with the greatest assurance, that he had performed the Commandment of the Lord; and when *Samuel* asked *what meant the bleating of Sheep and lowing of Oxen about him?* he answered unconcerned, *we spared them out of the best of the Amalekites Flocks and Herds, for a Sacrifice to the Lord thy God*; as if the destruction of these had been no part of his Commission, though they were devoted with words as express as any of the rest.

'Sir, said the Prophet, pray give me leave to tell you, what God said to me this night.' Leave being granted, he proceeded thus. 'When you were obscure and inconsiderable, even in your own esteem, God raised you to be King of *Israel*, which was a noble demonstration of

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his regard for you, and should have obliged you to an exact performance of all his Commands. Why then did you not destroy all that belonged to *Amalek*, as you were ordered to do? I have, said the King, done my part; but the People would reserve a Sacrifice out of the things which should have been destroyed. This was but a mean excuse, to lay the fault upon the Soldiers, who were under his command, and durst not have disobeyed his Orders: And though afterwards he says he was afraid of restraining them from taking the Spoil, yet it is plain from the History that he authorized them to do it by his own Example; and it seems he never intended to do otherwise, as being perswaded that his good intention would more than atone for the Offence, and that these Spoils would be sanctified by offering to God a plentiful Sacrifice out of them.

THE Prophet saw that this was his meaning, and hereupon took occasion to assure him, that he very much mistook the Will and Pleasure of the Almighty. *For hath the Lord, said he, as great delight in Burnt-Offerings and Sacrifices, as in Obeying his Voice?* You cannot think so, whatever you may pretend: Since no Service can be acceptable to him, which is performed in contradiction to his express Will. The Sacrifice that is obtained by the breach of any one of God's Laws, though never so rich and sumptuous, is an abomination to him. Know therefore that you have incurred his high Displeasure, by bringing these Spoils before him. For how can you think he will regard these Sacrifices with a gracious Eye, which consist of such things as he himself had doomed to be burnt in the Enemies Country, without being carried any farther? When you burn these upon his Altar, you tell him, that you have mended the instructions
which

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‘ which he gave you, and that you have acted
 ‘ more wisely and profitably by saving these rich
 ‘ Spoils for a Sacrifice, than if you had strictly
 ‘ fulfilled his word, and consumed these with
 ‘ other things of small value. Herein you have
 ‘ contradicted good sense and reason, which
 ‘ would have told you, *That Obedience is better*
 ‘ *than Sacrifice*, and a strict performance of God’s
 ‘ word more pleasing to him than the fat of
 ‘ Rams.’

THIS Assertion of the Prophet *Samuel*, of the preference of Obedience above Sacrifice, is ratified and confirmed by the unanimous Suffrage of the wisest and best of men.

1st, *ASAPH*, Psalm l. 13, 14. introduces God saying to men, *Will I eat the flesh of Bulls, or drink the blood of Goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble; so will I deliver thee, and thou shalt glorifie me.* And in the following Psalm, *David* praying to God for the pardon of his Sins in the case of *Uriah*, he says: *Thou desirest not Sacrifice, else would I give it: But thou delightest not in Burnt-Offering. The Sacrifices of God are a broken Spirit; a broken and a contrite Heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* 2dly, His Son and Successor *Solomon* observes, *Prov. xxi. 3.* that *to do Justice and Judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than Sacrifice.* 3dly, *Isaiah i.* and *lxvi.* represents God as utterly abhorring the Sacrifices of the wicked *Jeus*, while their manners were impure, and odious to him. And 4thly, in *Jeremiah vii. 22.* God tells them; *I commanded not your Fathers in the day that I brought them out of Egypt concerning Burnt-Offerings or Sacrifices: But this thing I commanded them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my People.* 5thly, *Hosea vi. 6.* *I desired Mercy and not Sacrifice; and*

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the knowledge of God more than Burnt-Offering. 6thly. Mic. vi. 7. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Rams &c. He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what he requires, viz. To do justly, and love Mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.

AND this may suffice to shew how the Sacred Writers agree in their sayings to support this Maxim, which was first pronounced by *Samuel*, as a general rule of Divine Worship, that God delights in the Obedience of his Servants more than in their Sacrifices.

SAMUEL's saying, I confess, may be restrained to this Fact of *Saul* which occasioned it, that whereas he had saved the Spoil which he should have destroyed, and thought it might be better expended in a Sacrifice, he was very much mistaken in doing as he did, having no Authority to make such Commutation: For God had not required this Sacrifice at his hand, but on the contrary had injoyn'd him to consume the matter of it as a Prophane thing. But this might be said, without depreciating those Sacrifices which were instituted by Divine Authority in the *Mosaick* Law, and were thereby made part of the Religious Worship of the *Israelites*, and consequently any neglect or contempt of them had been an act of Disobedience.

HOWEVER, those Sentences which I have quoted out of the *Psalms* and the *Prophets*, plainly declare, that, upon the comparison, *Obedience is better than these Sacrifices*; if by Obedience we understand, as we very justly may, the pious Affections and Actions of the Worshipper, and by Sacrifices the external Rites and Ceremonies of Religion.

THAT Sacrifices of God's instituting, were acceptable to him, when rightly offered, appears from the reasons and ends of their Institution; but

but so, as that it appears at the same time, that it was not for any intrinsic Virtue in themselves, but for the Piety and Virtue of the Offerer, that they were an acceptable and laudable part of Religion.

AND therefore we are not to interpret this of *Samuel*, or any of the Texts abovementioned, as if Sacrifices under the *Mosaick* Dispensation were things prohibited, and displeasing to God; that's impossible, for he ordained them; but they were not to be esteemed as the chief parts of Religion; they were but subservient to Piety and Virtue, for the furthering of which alone they were instituted, and not for any Merit or Holiness in themselves. If those who offered them, made such account of them, as to neglect the weightier points of the Law, Justice and Mercy, and the Love of God, which was the common delusion of the infatuated *Jews*, God declaimed against them by his Prophets, and thrust them from his Altar, assuring them, that while their Hearts were impure, their Sacrifices were an Abomination to him.

SACRIFICES were instituted as helps to Divine Worship, but not such necessary conditions of it, as that a Man could not worship God acceptably without them; for in *Israel* the offering of them was confined to one Place, even to the Temple at *Jerusalem*, to which many good People could not possibly resort at the stated times, who were either in foreign Countries, or disabled to travel by Sickness or other accidents. In such cases we cannot doubt but God accepted of the pure and pious Devotions of their Hearts, without these external Oblations.

THE forecited passages fully justify this Opinion; and one of them particularly in *Jer. vii. 22.* where he tells his People, that *in the day when he brought their Fathers out of Egypt, he commanded them*

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them nothing concerning Burnt-offerings or Sacrifices, but only to obey his Voice, and walk in his ways. This Text must be carefully interpreted as to the time it denotes; otherwise it may seem to contradict the whole Levitical Law; for it is certain that God gave that Law to *Israel* during the time of their Travels from *Egypt* to *Canaan*; but it is as certain, that at the time here spoken of by *Jeremiah*, i. e. at that juncture when he delivered them from their *Egyptian* Slavery, he had not given them any commands or directions about Sacrificing. And the force of the Prophet's Argument here, to prove Obedience better than Sacrifice, is this; that seeing God was pleased to own *Israel* in *Egypt* for his People, before he had given them the Law of Sacrifices, and only upon condition that they should keep themselves from Idols, and serve him as their God, this proves that this kind of Obedience has the precedence of Sacrifice, and is more essential to true Religion.

AND therefore it was an ill-grounded determination which some *Jews* in our Saviour's time had made upon that Question, commonly debated in their Schools, *Which is the first and great Commandment*, that the command of sacrificing was the greatest. Their Ancestors indeed were apt to run into this Notion, as we find by what we have seen in the Prophets to this purpose. But our Lord corrects them, when this question was put to him, by answering, *That the Love of God was the first Commandment, and the Love of our Neighbour the next to it, and that on these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.* And in this resolution he was justified by one of the Scribes who heard him, and cried, *It is well spoken. For to love the Lord our God with all our Heart, and Soul, and Strength, and Mind, and our Neighbour as our selves, is more than all Burnt-*
Offerings

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Offerings and Sacrifices. To which if we add what the *Jews* say in their comment upon that of *Hosea*, *I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice*, that acts of beneficence are more pleasing to God than all the Oblations which the *Israelites* offer upon his Altar, we may conclude, that many of the *Jews*, in their most corrupt State, held it better to worship God in Spirit and in Truth, than to neglect the Heart, and abound in the outward rites of Religion.

THE reason of this is so plain, that the very *Pagans* could not help seeing it, through all the thick Clouds of their Idolatry. The more considerate of their Philosophers and learned Men, observing how profuse many People were in offering Sacrifice, who were polluted with many detestable Crimes, and still persisted in them, declared in their Discourses and Writings, that their Gods were not pleased with such Sacrifices, but would much rather have more honesty, and less expence in their Worship. 'Tis a precept of *Menander* the ancient Greek Poet; *When you Sacrifice to God, says he, bring an honest Mind; and do not put on the white Garment for that purpose, before your Affections and Manners bear some correspondence to it.* *Socrates* used to say, *That the Gods, who wanted not the goods of Men, had more regard to the Affections than the Riches of their Worshipers.* For since the worst of Men are oftentimes the wealthiest, it would be in vain to serve the Gods, if the rich Man by his Present could carry his cause against the Poor. *Tully*, in his second Book of the Nature of the Gods, teaches, *that we then perform the best and most grateful service to them, when we worship them with a pure, upright, incorrupt, and sanctified Heart and Tongue.* *Porphyrus* in his second Book against the eating of Animals, has this passage among many others to the like purpose, *The surest way, says he, for any Man to become temperate, pious and just, is to be persuaded, that the*
Gods

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Gods stand in no need of his Sacrifices, but have great regard to the frame of his Mind; and if he has most worthy Sentiments of them, they esteem that the best Sacrifice. And to add one more Testimony, Seneca, as quoted by Lactantius, speaks thus: Would you conceive the Majesty of the great God to be placable and gentle, full of loving-kindness, and always ready to do good? You must then imagine him to be pleased in his Worship, not so much with the Blood of Sacrifices, as with a pure Mind, and an honest Intention.

T H E R E are many other passages of like importance in the learned *Gentile* Philosophers and Poets; but these are enough to shew how exactly they concur with Sacred Writ, in preferring Obedience before Sacrifice.

N O T H I N G of all this is intended to derogate from the suitableness of Sacrifices, while their institution lasted, or of any present Ceremony or Observance, which may contribute to the solemnity and improvement of divine Worship. God knows that the Majesty of Religion cannot well be exhibited to the Eyes of Men, without the advantage of some external Ornaments to beautifie and recommend it; and therefore he found out and prescribed such Ornaments in his Worship of old. All the danger is, lest Men should so far rest in these things, as to perswade themselves that to be punctual in them is Religion enough, and so take no care that their Heart be right, and their Conversation agreeable to the Will of God. It appears, from what we have quoted on this Occasion, that both *Jews* and *Gentiles* were extremely prone to fall into this fatal Mistake, as finding it much more easie to put on a cloke and form of Religion, in some acts of Devotion, than to admit the Spirit of it in their Hearts, and its Laws in their Lives and Conversations. Which is the reason why the forementioned Writers abound with so many

many Admonitions to preserve Men from running into this pernicious Error.

BUT the special Lesson which we are to learn from the Miscarriage of *Saul*, I take to be this; that we do not indulge a licentious humour in interpreting the Word of God; but take it in the most natural and obvious Meaning which it offers to our Understandings. This is the safest way of interpreting any Law; and the Laws of God, which concern us in our respective Callings and Stations, are conceived in such Words as we may easily understand them, and must be very perverse and forward, if we will not pursue the true intent and meaning of them.

WHAT could make this Commission to *Saul* more plain, than the words in which it was delivered to him by *Samuel*? Whereby he is charged, not to spare so much as an Ox or a Sheep of *Amalek*, but utterly to destroy them all. Yet he was such a Libertine in his Notions, as to think he did right, in bringing whole droves of them to *Gilgal*. For he considered they would quickly be destroyed in Sacrifice; and he thought this was a much better way of destroying them, than to make no use of them at all. And in this he was so confident that he had fulfilled the command of God, that he triumphed in it, and the Prophet had much ado to convince him that he had failed.

THIS shews us how easie it is for us, but how horrible at the same time, to pervert the Word of God, when we do not mightily relish the plain Construction of it, but will needs interpret it according to our own loose and free way of thinking, till we make it comply with our own carnal Ends and Affections. I hardly know of any Sin more common, than this audacious freedom which Men take with the Sacred Word of God: But how offensive it is to the most High, and how
penal

penal to the Offenders, we may learn from the doom and sentence which was passed upon King *Saul* for so doing.

ONE of the Woes which our Saviour denounced against the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, was for this, that they had made the Word of God of none effect, i. e. they had interpreted away the genuine Sense, the Mind of God in it, by their Traditions and false glosses upon it. How many such *Scribes* and *Pharisees* would Christ find to reprove in Christendom, were he now personally amongst us? With this aggravation of our Guilt, that while we are condemning them, we our selves are doing the same thing.

LET us learn at last to deal sincerely with God and our own Souls. Let us believe that he will judge us according to his, and not according to our own Gospel, as we make it by our perverse Construction of it. And as we would escape the punishment of Hypocrites and Dissemblers with him at the last Day, let us receive his Laws in their just force and meaning, and perform all the duties which they injoin us, with that Frequency, Care, and Sincerity, that we may not be afraid or ashamed that our Works should follow us, and be weighed in the balance of the Sanctuary, and prove that we have not laboured in vain in the duties which our Saviour Jesus Christ has given us to do. To him, &c.





SERMON XXVIII.

On the Sixth Sunday after TRINITY.



2 SAMUEL xii. 13.

*And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned
against the Lord.*

ST. Paul, 2 Cor. ii. observes, that the preaching of God's Word is to some Men the favour of Life, to others the favour of Death, by reason of the different Affections wherewith they entertain it, and the contrary conclusions which they draw from it. But in no part of Scripture does this happen so commonly, as in the History of those Sins and Miscarriages wherewith the best of Men were sometimes overtaken. The design of the Spirit of God in recording such Misfortunes, is, to admonish us all of the frailty of our Nature, and deceitfulness of our Hearts, and to represent to the best of Men, how much it concerns them to be constantly upon their Guard, and never to indulge themselves in the neglect of their Prayers, or omission of any religious Duties, lest Satan, who always lies
in

in wait to surprize them, should get an advantage over them by his Temptations. And likewise to encourage them, if at any time they happen to fall into his snare, to disengage themselves from it with all speed; not to be pleased with his Enchantments; not to abandon themselves to sinful courses; not to despair of the Mercy of God, and imagine that they have unpardonably sinned against him, and have nothing but the portion of Reprobates left them; since they are assured, that those who without all peradventure are the Elect Children of God, and rest in him, did not run the whole course of this mortal Life without some great slip and offence committed against him. These are the instructions which the Wisdom of God intends to give us, by shewing us the miscarriages of his most eminent, faithful Servants.

BUT then there are a perverse Generation of Men, who make a pernicious use of these Memorials, and conclude from them, that because God was quickly reconciled to his offending Servants, and in general has exprest his high approbation of them, as he has done of this very King *David*, that therefore he is not so great an Enemy to Sin, as we commonly represent him. In consequence of this persuasion they flatter themselves, that they have good authority for gratifying their Lusts, and need not be much concerned to mortifie them, provided they do in general perform the positive part of the Divine Laws. Hence they proceed to assert that there is an unchangeable decree of their designation to eternal Life; and that the love and favour of God is so sure to them, that nothing which they have a mind to do, can forfeit it, or separate them from it. And so they come at last to settle in this opinion, that let their present life and conversation be as bad as it will, yet being of the number of God's chosen Servants, their End shall

be happy, and they shall certainly meet with some event, which by the Grace of God will give them an effectual turn and conversion from a bad life, before they be taken out of the World: Thus multitudes of People live under the power of these delusions, continuing in Sin that Grace may abound, and wresting these and many such Scriptures from their true design, to such a sense as lays conscience asleep, and carries them smoothly to their own destruction.

THAT we may therefore make a profitable use of the History of *David's* Fall here before us, let us consider,

I. THE matter of his transgressions.

II. THE aggravation of his guilt.

III. THE punishment which God inflicted; And,

IV. THE voluntary penance which he underwent for them.

AND Iſt, As to the matter of *David's* transgressions, and the occasion which involved him in them, I shall take the account from *Josephus*, *Antiq. Jud.* lib. vii. c. 7. who reports it thus:

‘ That about twelve years after *David* had been
‘ settled in the quiet possession of the Kingdom
‘ of *Israel* and *Judah*, he committed a War which
‘ he had with the *Ammonites*, to the management
‘ of *Joab* the General of his Army, retiring him-
‘ self to his palace at *Jerusalem*. During which
‘ time of recess and leisure, he fell in love with
‘ *Bathsheba* the wife of *Urias*, one of *Joab's* cap-
‘ tains, upon an accidental view which he had of
‘ her, and so far pursued his criminal passion as
‘ to cause her to be brought to his own bed:
‘ But to cover the dishonesty of this practice,
‘ her daily residence was at her own house. Prov-
‘ ing with child in the long absence of her Hus-
‘ band, who might convict her of adultery, and

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' take away her life, she besought the King to
 ' think of some way how to provide for her safe-
 ' ty. Hereupon *David* sent for *Urias* from the
 ' Siege of *Rabbath*, and enquired of him about
 ' the state of the Town and Army; and when
 ' his demands were satisfied, he ordered him to
 ' go home, and sent a good supper after him, to
 ' feast with his Wife. But understanding next
 ' day that *Urias* had tarried all night with the
 ' Guards about the palace, he called him, and
 ' asked him why he went not to his own house
 ' to visit his family, as husbands that have been
 ' long absent are desirous to do. *Urias* replied,
 ' That it did not become him to take his ease
 ' and his pleasure, while the Ark and Priests of
 ' God, and his General and Fellow-Soldiers were
 ' encamped in the open field, and in an Enemy's
 ' Country. Then the King invited him to spend
 ' that day also in the palace, promising to send
 ' him back to the Army the day following. At
 ' night he entertained him at Supper in his own
 ' company, and caused him to drink wine very
 ' plentifully, and then dismissed him to his Lodg-
 ' ing, hoping that he would go home. But when
 ' he found next morning that *Urias* had lodged
 ' in the Guards, as he had done before, the King
 ' wrote a Letter to *Joab*, intimating to him that
 ' *Urias* had offended him; that therefore when
 ' they made an assault upon the City, he should
 ' assign him the hottest place of the engagement,
 ' and then retire from him, that he might be cut
 ' off. This Letter he sealed, and gave to *Urias*
 ' to deliver to *Joab*; who having perused it, fol-
 ' lowed the instructions, and ordered *Urias* to at-
 ' tempt a part of the wall where he knew the
 ' *Ammonites* would make a stout resistance, com-
 ' plimenting him with the reputation which he
 ' had

had with the King and the whole Army on the account of his valour; and promising to support him effectually, if he made any impression upon the enemy in that place. But this he never intended to do; on the contrary he had given secret orders to the Soldiers who accompanied him, that when they should see the *Ammonites* sally out with the greatest fury, they should retreat and abandon *Urias*. Most of them did so, and *Urias* was slain with some few of his Men that stood by him, after they had destroyed a much greater number of their Enemies.

THE success of this affair was quickly notified to the King, and to the Wife of the deceased, who put herself in mourning for her Husband, and kept retired some days, as the *Jewish* Law required; which being ended, the King took her to Wife, and she bare him a Son.

So that it was three quarters of a year at least that *David* was sinning and offending against God, without making any step towards repentance: For it was not 'till after the Child was born, that *Nathan* the Prophet was sent from God to awaken the King to a sense of his evil doings; which the Prophet performed with a very wise and happy address, proposing to the King, by way of information and demand of justice, the case of a poor nameless Man, who had been grievously injured by his rich Neighbour, whereby he drew the King to pass a very righteous sentence upon the case, and then applied it to himself, *Thou art the Man*; and hence he proceeds very plainly to reprove him for the adultery and murder which he had committed.

THUS we have seen the matter of *David's* Sins: They were the grossest violations of the

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sixth and seventh Commandments of the moral Law : which was the first thing to be treated of in this Discourse. Let us now proceed,

IIly, To consider those circumstances which attended his Sins, and made them the more grievous, more exceeding sinful.

THE first circumstance which aggravated his guilt, was his ingratitude to God, and unsuitable returns which he made for the greatest Blessings. *David* had been raised, by a special and signal hand of Divine Providence, from the low estate of a Shepherd, to be King of all *Israel* and *Judah*. God had made choice of him, the youngest of seven Brethren, and sent *Samuel* to Anoint him when he was but a youth, and to admonish him of the reasons why he was destined to the Throne, in opposition to *Saul* and his Family : Because *Saul* had disobeyed the voice of the Lord in several cases ; particularly in not destroying the *Amalekites*, as God had commanded. Therefore *David* was appointed for his Successor, in confidence that he would act with quite another Spirit, and be very observant of the will of God in all things. In order to glorifie God by such an exact Obedience it was, that God had delivered him from many imminent dangers of his Life, during the reign of *Saul* ; who seeing how the Divine Providence raised him daily in the Esteem and Affections of the People, and that he was looked upon as the Heir apparent of his Crown, he mortally hated him ; and sometimes put him upon hazardous expeditions against the *Philistines*, hoping that he would fall by their hands ; at other times he cast his Javelin at him ; and when he sought so notoriously to destroy him, that *David* durst no longer abide in his Court, but was forced to fly for his Life, and conceal himself in Caves and Desarts, as well as he could, *Saul* pursued

fued him both with armed Force and secret Machinations. From all which the good hand of God constantly rescued him, and in due time cut off *Saul* to make room for *David*, who succeeded him not only in the Royal Power and Dignity, but likewise in the possession of his House, and the enjoyment of his Wives: For these, says *Nathan*, *God gave into your bosom*; which being added to those whom he had Married before he was King, made his number of Wives ten or twelve, as the *Rabbins* observe: And he might have had more, if he would have taken them in the way which God then allowed of.

BUT after all these indulgences, to give himself up to the Adulterous Concupiscence of another man's Wife, and for the satisfying such a Lust, to violate two of God's most Sacred Laws in a horrible manner, was a foul act of Ingratitude towards his most High and Gracious Benefactor.

2dly, ANOTHER Circumstance which aggravated *David's* Sins, was the contempt and slight which he put upon the Authority of God's Laws, by the Commission of them. He was now grown to be an absolute Prince, and began to flatter himself that he was above the Laws; at least, that he might take more liberty with them than other men. It is true, Murderers and Adulterers were by the command of God to be put to death; But what mortal man could touch his Life, or hurt so much as a hair of his Head, who held the Sword of Justice in his own hand, and had the disposal of all Judges and Ministers of Justice, as those who were but his own Creatures and Vassals. And so far indeed he reckoned right, that he was in no danger from the proceedings of any Court or human Tribunal. But however this ought not to have encouraged him to make bold

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with the Laws of God, as if they were not intended to bind men of his high Station and Dignity. For God, who is King over all, hath given no man, of what rank or quality soever, a licence to offend against Piety and Virtue; but has threatened that *mighty Sinners shall be mightily tormented*, if not in the present, yet in a future State, where *Tophet* is prepared of Old even for such Kings as despise the will of God, and that it is heated hotter for them than for meaner men.

AND even with regard to the present State, it is a fatal delusion for the greatest Potentate upon Earth to assume to himself a liberty of Sinning, as fancying that he is above the reach of Temporal Punishments. For God has a thousand ways to inflict them on the highest head, and many undeniable instances there are of Executions of this kind. With these he threatens *David* by the Prophet *Nathan*: *Because thou hast despised me in taking the Wife of Urias, and killing him with the Sword of the Children of Ammon; therefore the Sword shall never depart from thy House. Behold, I will raise up Evil against thee out of thine own Family; and I will take thy Wives before thine eyes, and will give them to thy Neighbour, and he shall lye with them in the sight of this Sun. For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the Sun.* How punctually all this was executed, we shall see presently; and how *David*, by promising himself more impunity than other men, brought more temporal judgments upon his own head. His contempt of such Punishments did but aggravate and enhance them.

3dly, THE greatness of *David's* Example made no small addition to the guilt of his Sin. For as he was a King, he was the Guardian of the Laws of his Kingdom, and was bound to testify his own good Affection and Esteem for them, as well

well by a diligent practice of them in his own Person and Family, as by enforcing the Observance of them with rewards and punishments throughout his Kingdom. Nothing can give such a currency to good Laws, as to see them stamped with the Royal example. But when they are used like Spiders webbs, and easily broke through by the great ones, the meaner sort of People quickly follow them, if it were for nothing else but to be in the fashion. And though those who hold the reins of Government, should keep never so strict a hand upon their Subjects, yet they will excite them to do little more than blaspheme at the severity which is exercised upon them, so long as they allow themselves the enjoyment of those sinful pleasures which they deny to others. For those who are restrained by such hands, will be apt to think that their Superiors envy them such enjoyments as too good for them, rather than prohibit them as hurtful. But indeed there is not often occasion given to complain of such Envy: For it is notorious in experience, that immoral Governors are not forward to lash their favourite Vice, as thinking it but reasonable and modest, to connive as much as they can at that Vice in others, which they know others see plain enough in their own practice. And they know very well, that if they can but make it fashionable, they shall much lessen the Odium of it, and thenceforward may enjoy it with more reputation, ease, and security, as having many who by the like guilt, are bribed and interested in their favour.

Thus the bad example of *David* added to the guilt of his Sin, because it encouraged his Subjects to imitate him in it, and likewise cooled his Zeal against it, that he could not heartily punish it in others, so long as he continued in it himself.

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4thly, *DAVID's* Sin was much aggravated by the Merits of *Urias*, the suffering Party; who was of the same Religion with the King, and consequently entitled to all the benefit and protection of its Laws. For though he is called an *Hittite* for some accidental reason, not clear to us; yet it is manifest, from the place he was in, and the concern he express'd for the Ark of God, that he was a worshipper of the God of *Israel*. He was moreover a Citizen of *Jerusalem*, a considerable Officer in the Army, a man of great Valour and Loyalty, who preferred the Service of his Prince and Country before his own interests and pleasures, as appears from the character given of him before. All which made it much more inexcusable in *David* to injure him as he did, than if he had been some worthless man, who had never deserved well of him.

THESE were the chief circumstances which aggravated *David's* transgressions, which was the second thing to be considered in the order of this Discourse. Let us now, in the

III^d place, SEE the Punishments which God inflicted upon him for them.

AND we heard just now what God threatned by *Nathan*, that his Adultery should be punished with the publick violation of his own Wives, and his Murther with continual Paricides and Slaughters in his own Family. And here it is worth while to note the speedy and surprizing Execution of these threatnings. For though as soon as *David* had confessed his Sin, God was pleas'd so far to remit it, as to promise he would spare his own Life, yet he presently struck his new-born Child with death; and the very next chapter opens a sad beginning of Calamities in the Royal Family. *Amnon*, one of his Sons, commits an incestuous Rape upon his daughter *Thamar*; and *Abalom* another

another Son, assassinate his Brother *Amnon* in revenge of this lewd fact. A little while after the same *Absalom* raises all *Israel* in rebellion against the King his Father, whom he drives from *Jerusalem* to the other side of *Jordan*, seizes upon his houses, and abuses all his Wives and Concubines to make them his own. This was done in pursuance of *Ahitophel's* Counsel, who told *Absalom* that all the People, when they should hear of this impudent violation, would conclude that there was no danger that the King and his Son should ever be reconciled, and consequently they would adhere more unanimously and firmly to *Absalom*. And this was done in that publick manner as *Nathan* had threatned, *in the sight of Israel, and in the face of the Sun*, as we read 2 Sam. xvi. 21, 22.

AND though the xviith chapter presents us with the agreeable event of this unnatural Rebellion, which ended in the overthrow of *Absalom's* Party, and the restoration of *David* to his Throne and Kingdom; yet the Father had the mortification to lose his Son in the Battel, whom he tenderly loved, and bitterly bewailed his death, wishing it had pleased God that he had died for him: and the rather, no doubt, because he considered this loss as a farther Execution of God's threatening by *Nathan*, that the Sword should never depart from his House.

LASTLY, though *David* did not live to see it, yet we find another of his Sons cut off by the Sword, even *Adonijah*, at the command of his Brother *Solomon*, for aspiring to place himself on the Throne of *David* his Father. Add to this the misfortune which happened to this Family in the next Succession, when the ten Tribes of *Israel* wholly revolted and separated for ever from the House of *David*, and the frequent Wars which they levied against them; and we can-

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not be at a loss to make out the truth of this Prophecy, and to prove that *David* was punished according to the full intent and meaning of God's Denunciation.

But besides the outward, there was an inward Sword, a sword of long remorse and horror which pierced the soul and reins of this Offender, and created him many a restless Night, and cost him many a flood of Tears, as we find him often complaining in his Book of Psalms. And this brings us, in the

IVth and last place, to consider how humbly and heartily *David* repented of these his grievous Sins. The reproof of *Nathan* he received with that humility and reverence which was due to a Message sent from God: And when, according to the Prophet's Denunciation, his infant Son was struck with a mortal Sickness, he did not frame his looks and carriage to a contemptuous Gallantry, but laid aside his royal Apparel, put on Sackcloth, fasted, and made the hard and cold ground his Bed, for seven Nights together, *i. e.* from the day that his Child was taken ill, till the day of its Death, in which time he interceded with God for its Life, and poured out his Soul continually in penitential Prayers and Confessions, a specimen of which he hath left us in his fifty first Psalm, composed upon this Occasion; which was probably a part of his daily Devotions through all the following course of his Life.

THIS deep humiliation, in a sense of his own demerits, brought him to a perfect submission and resignation to the divine Will under the severest Dispensations. Thus when he was forced to fly before his rebellious Son *Absalom*, and *Zadok* the Priest upon that occasion attended him with the Ark of God; he thought it too great an honour to be so waited on, and ordered him to carry it back again to

Jerusalem.

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Jerusalem. For, says he, if I shall find favour in the Eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back again, and shew me both his Ark and his Habitation. But if God say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here I am; let him do unto me as seemeth him good. The same conscience of what he had deserved, taught him forbearance and long-suffering under the insults of Men. For when *Shimei* curs'd him at the time of his sad flight, casting dust and stones at him, and calling him bloody Man, and Son of *Belial*, *David* bare it all with a silent Patience. And when *Abishai*, Soldier-like, ask'd, *Why should this dead dog curse my Lord the King?* Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head: the King meekly answered, Let him curse; he has God's Permission for it. Who then shall say, why hast thou done so? It may be the Lord will look on my Afflictions, and requite me good for his cursing this day.

SUCH was *David's* opinion of his own demerits, in contemplation of the injuries which he had done to God and Man by his Sins. As he had sinned grossly, so he repented bitterly. And his Sins were of very short continuance in comparison of his Repentance. Very contrary to the practice of most Men, who spend the best of their days in the service of the World and the Flesh, and depend upon a little of their last and worst time to reconcile themselves to God, and prepare their Souls for his Kingdom.

DAVID, says *St. Ambrose*, by an ingenuous confession of his Sin, and a thorough compunction of Heart and Mind, recommended himself to the Divine Pardon. No sooner was he convinced, but he was converted. He made haste and prolonged not the time in returning to his obedience of God's Commands. Shew me now a Man among the rich and honourable, who when he is reprov'd by any of God's Ministers, takes it so patiently, and reforms

his life so effectually as this great Prince did. He was like other Kings in his Sin, but very unlike them in his Repentance. For what crowned Head ever implored the Mercy of God with so many Prayers and Tears, humbling himself in the Dust, and watching and fasting commonly whole nights and days together, and calling upon all great Sinners to do the like, teaching them what a grievous and bitter thing it is to forfeit the Favour of God by rebelling against him; but assuring them withal, that when they have sinned, it is much more pleasing to God, and profitable for themselves, to confess it, than to extenuate their Guilt, and conceal and dissemble it.

AFTER all, we know very well, that notwithstanding the Miscarriages here before us, this Offender was one of the greatest of God's Servants, an excellent King, and a most divine Prophet, endowed with a wonderful measure of the Spirit of God, and one of the greatest Pillars of his Church; in whose Words the whole Church Militant upon Earth, daily offers up her Prayers and Praises.

LET us not then dishonour his Memory by any light or undecent Remarks upon his Miscarriages, but treat him as one who highly deserves the character of a Holy Man. Let us take warning by his Misfortunes, not to provoke God with any the like Sins; and for whatever sins we have committed or shall commit, let us imitate him in a serious Repentance, that so making a timely Peace with God in this Life, we may be happily restored to his Favour, and may be numbred with this his Saint in Glory everlasting, through the Merits of the Son of *David*, even Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth, &c.



SERMON XXIX.

On the Seventh Sunday after TRINITY.



2 SAM. xxi. 1.

Then there was a Famine in the days of David, three years, year after year: And David enquired of the Lord; and the Lord answered, It is for Saul and for his bloody House, because he slew the Gibeonites.



THE Substance of the History before us is this. Presently after the Rebellion of *Absalom* and the Sedition of *Sheba* the son of *Bichri* were ended, there begun a grievous Famine in the Land of *Canaan*, by reason of an extraordinary drought, which continued for three years together. For that part of the World is as apt to suffer by the want of rain, as we are by the excess of it. Which was the cause, I suppose, why King *David* might pass over the first and second years of Drought as proceeding from the constitution of the Air, without any special hand of God in

in it. But when he had suffered the loss of two Harvests, and beheld the same fate threatening the third, then he took it for an infallible token of God's high displeasure, and consulted the Oracle of the Sanctuary, what should be done to appease him. The Answer of God was, that he inflicted this judgment on account of the unjust slaughter which *Israel* had made of the *Gibeonites*, in the reign of his predecessor King *Saul*. For the *Gibeonites* were a branch of the *Amorites*, the old Inhabitants of the Land, and should have been destroyed at *Israel's* first coming into *Canaan*; but by a stratagem which they used, they obtained a grant of their lives of *Joshua* and the Elders of *Israel*, which was confirmed to them by a solemn Oath. Notwithstanding this Oath, *Saul*, in his zeal to his own People, endeavoured to root them out, and did actually cut off great numbers of them. This breach of Faith was a great dishonour to God, by whose awful name *Israel* had sworn to spare the lives of these Men; and therefore God scourged the Transgressors with a long famine, for such their perjury and murder.

DAVID being made sensible of this, sends for the injured *Gibeonites*, and confers with them about their sufferings, and asks them what satisfaction they demanded for the wrong that had been done them. They answered, that they desired neither Silver nor Gold, nor the life of any *Israelite*; but only seven men of the house of *Saul*, whom they would put to death, as a Sacrifice for the Massacre which he had committed upon their Families. *David* having heard their Demand, ordered seven of *Saul's* posterity to be deliverd into their hands, viz. two Sons of *Rizpah Saul's* Concubine, and five Sons of his Daughter *Michal*, whom she brought up for *Adriel*, as it is said here, though according to our style they were but

but her Nephews, being the Sons of *Merab* her elder Sister, who was married to *Adriel*, as we read *1 Sam. xviii. 19.* but because *Michal* was their Aunt, and bred them up, according to the custom of the *Hebrews*, they were reputed her Sons.

THESE seven were delivered by *David* into the hands of the *Gibeonites*, who hanged them up unto the Lord, *i. e.* to appease his anger and vindicate his honour, in *Gibeah*, the City where *Saul* and his Family dwelt, to make the punishment the more remarkable and shameful: After which Execution, God sent down a seasonable Rain upon the Land, and restored it to its usual Fertility.

Now this History thus displayed will afford us three useful Topicks for our present Discourse.

Ist, *DAVID's* Concern for the Famine which lay upon his People.

IIdly, THE Ground or meritorious Cause which brought this Famine upon them.

IIIIdly, THE Means which *David* used for the removal of it.

And Ist, WHEN *David* saw the long continuance of the Famine, and concluded from thence that God had a controversy with the Land on the account of some publick Iniquity, he made it his business to enquire who and what it was that had offended the Divine Majesty, and what was to be done in order to reconcile him, and obtain of him the blessing of a fruitful Season. That *David* made this enquiry by the Ministry of the High-Priest, standing, and praying, and offering Sacrifice before the Ark, according to the Law *Exod. xxviii. 30, &c.* is the general Opinion of Interpreters. For though he himself was a great Prophet, yet we cannot but think that he was strictly legal in a matter of this nature, both that he might avoid the error of *Saul*, who was too forward to consult

ful the Oracle himself, and also that he might decline the Odium of any execution which might look too favourable towards himself, and too hard upon his Enemies, as this in particular would have done, had the commission proceeded immediately from himself and his own single Authority.

BUT it was enough for him, in difficult cases, to ask Counsel of God, by the means of his own appointing. The Sons of *Aaron* were consecrated to make Addresses to God for the learning of his Will; and the King was to put them upon making such Addresses, when the exigence of Affairs required it.

AND herein *David* show'd himself Pious towards God, and compassionate towards his People. When bad years were repeated, and the Famine grew very grievous, he no longer considered it as a natural event, that might happen at any time, but rightly concluded that it was God's judgment, and that it had been drawn down upon them by some publick Provocation.

THIS conclusion was founded upon the abundant Revelations which God has made of his dealings with a Sinful People; telling them that Famine, Pestilence and Sword, and other publick Calamities were his Scourges, wherewith he would chastize them when they rebelled against him.

HEREUNTO agree the Sentiments of the more considerate men of all Nations and Religions in the World; who were ever perswaded that publick Judgments were the vials of Divine wrath poured out upon men for some crying Sin. We are told by the most ancient and celebrated of their Writers, that when the *Grecian* Army lying before *Troy* were consumed by a devouring Pestilence, their great Champion *Achilles* imployed the Prophet *Chalcas* to enquire of the Deity what it was that had offended him, and what Sacrifice he demanded

demanded of the *Grecians* to make an atonement for their Sin. I instance in this particular, as being of greatest antiquity next to Sacred Writ, and not as though passages of this nature were hard to be met with; they may easily be found in the Writings of all Nations.

AND there is a plain reason which obliges us to interpret publick Calamities as God's Visitations for publick Sins. For Nations and Societies of Men, as they are now combined together, are not transferable from this to another World. They subsist here by virtue of the Laws and Ordinances of their respective Governments, which will be useless and of no importance in a future State. And therefore the Divine Justice is concerned to render a recompence to the execution of such Laws in the State men are now in, beyond which they cannot go to be tryed or judged, and rewarded or punished as a Body Politick; their very Essence as such is dissolved and annihilated in this World.

INDEED particular Persons, of whom universals are composed, shall all appear before the great Tribunal of the last day, and receive an eternal recompence according to their works; and therefore their respective Portions here may be much better or worse than they really deserve, without any imputation on the justice of God, who will then rectifie all these seeming irregularities. But the present Nations and Societies of men will then be dissolved, as I just now observed, and therefore the Blessings or Punishments which belong to them as such, can be dispensed only in the present State.

AND thus we have divine Revelation, Consent of Nations, and the Reason and Necessity of the case to assure us, that publick Sins, whether of Impiety towards God, or Injustice towards men,

must and will be punished with publick Judgments. I confess such Dispensations are not always seen; not that they are not visible enough, but because men will not see them. Atheistical People, who abound in the World, and often fill the chief seats and high places of it, as they will not steer their course by the direction of God's Laws, so neither will they see his Arm when it is stretched out to punish; but always impute the Calamity to some other Cause. For they consider, that if they should acknowledge the hand of God in publick visitations, their Impiety and Injustice would quickly be noted as the meritorious Cause of his Anger. And therefore they ascribe all events to Nature and Fortune and fatal Necessity, and would gladly have all men to be perswaded, that the State and Condition of things will be the same, whether Religion be more or less prevalent in any Nation.

BUT men of such Atheistical Principles, instead of being Patriots and Friends, are the greatest Enemies to their Country, both as by their own Personal Iniquities they incense the wrath of God against it, and as by their Carriage and Discourses they hinder others from acknowledging it, and using proper means to appease it.

THE three years Famine which afflicted *Israel*, might have continued much longer upon them, and other Judgments would probably have been added to it, had not *David's* Piety moved him to enquire of God about it, and implore the blessing of a fruitful Season. For the end which God pursues in his Visitations of this kind, is, to bring Sinners to the acknowledgement of some crying Sin, to oblige them to put it away, and to make an Atonement for it by a serious Repentance: if this end be not obtained, he turns not away from his Anger, but his afflicting Hand will be stretched out still, until the

People whom he visits see his Rod, and for what he has appointed it. *David* was very sensible of this: and therefore like a gracious Prince and careful Father of his People, he enquires into and discovers the true cause of the Famine under which they groaned, and takes such a method as God directed, for the satisfying his Justice, and removing his Judgment. This was the first thing which offered itself to our consideration. Let us, now in the

II^d place, Look into the real Ground and Meritorious Cause which brought this Famine upon *Israel*. The answer of God to *David* acquaints us, that it was owing to *Saul* and to his bloody House, because he slew the *Gibeonites*.

WHEN and in what place this slaughter was committed, the Sacred Historian has not recorded. It is the Opinion of *Abarbinel*, a Jewish Commentator, that the place was *Nob*, a City of the Priests, and the time then when *Doeg* the *Edomite* informed King *Saul*, that he saw *David* there with *Abimelech* the Priest, who gave him Entertainment: Whereupon *Saul*, in a mad rage, caused not only the Priests, but all the Inhabitants of *Nob*, and the very Beasts belonging to it, to be slain with the Sword, as we read 1 Sam. xxii. And if any *Gibeonites* dwelt there, as *Abarbinel* thinks, they certainly suffered the same Fate. But I am far from thinking that this was the only time that *Saul* fell upon the *Gibeonites*. For it is said in the verse following my Text, that *Saul* sought to slay them in his Zeal to his own People; i. e. he thought he did a very popular act by gleaming them from among the Tribes of *Israel* and *Judah*; to whom by this means he hoped to endear himself, and establish the Kingdom in his own Family. But now this slaughter of the Priests which he committed at *Nob*, was so horrid a Massacre, and so odious to the *Israelites*, that the Officers of

his Guards refused to fall on when he commanded them, and none but *Doeg* was hardy enough to execute it. I conclude therefore, that it was not now, or at any one time, but gradually and upon various Occasions, that *Saul* attempted to extirpate the *Gibeonites* from among his own People.

To make a just estimate of the greatness of his Sin in so doing, we must look back to the ninth Chapter of *Joshua*, where we find that the Inhabitants of *Gibeon*, having heard how easily the *Israelites* had reduced the strong Cities of *Jericho* and *Ai*, and knowing themselves that they were part of the devoted Nations that were to be destroyed without Mercy; they consulted together how they might save themselves by a Stratagem; which was this; they chose out several of the gravest and wisest of their men, and sent them as Ambassadors to *Gilgal*, to treat an Alliance with *Joshua* and his People: They were to pretend, that they came from a Country very remote from the borders of *Canaan*; and that they might induce the *Israelites* to believe them, they were furnished out with every thing that was old and stale, as dry and mouldy Bread, old Wine-bottles, clouted Shoes, tattered Coats, and the like. In this Equipage they arrived in the *Jewish* Camp, and being brought before *Joshua* and the Governors, they declared their business, viz. How the *Gibeonites*, a very distant Nation, having heard of the wonderful things which God had done for *Israel*, both in *Egypt* and in their way to *Canaan*, and how he had given them this Land for an Inheritance, they much rejoiced at it, and desired to be received as their Confederates. The *Israelites* examined them about their Country, and told them that perhaps they were *Canaanites*, and then it was not in their power to make a League with them, being forbidden by the Law of their God

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to do it. To satisfy them in this, the *Gibeonites* desired them to observe their Furniture and Provisions, which were all new at their first setting out, and were grown thus old by the length of the Journey. With this answer the *Israelites* were satisfied, and made a peace with these men, without consulting the pleasure of God about it, as they used to do in difficult cases. *Joshua*, and *Eleazar* the High-Priest, and the Council of the Elders swore unto them, that they would esteem them as their Friends and Allies, and not suffer their People to commit any hostile act against them.

THREE days after this, *Israel* in their march came to the Cities of these *Gibeonites*, and fully understood that they were *Canaanites*. Whereupon the common Soldiers murmured at their Officers for making a league with them, because they were hereby debarred of the Spoils which their Cities would have afforded. But *Joshua* conferring with *Eleazar* and the Elders, answered the People, *We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore we may not touch them, lest wrath be upon us, because of the Oath which we swore unto them.* Then he called the *Gibeonites*, and having reprov'd them for prevaricating with him, he told them that he would maintain the Faith which he had sworn to them: but for a punishment of their fraud, *they should be Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water, for the service of the Tabernacle*; which was indeed a laborious, but a very commendable and worthy Employment.

THUS *Joshua* protected the *Gibeonites* from the fury of his own Soldiers; and afterwards, like a faithful Ally, marched with his whole Army, and rescued their Cities from the Siege of five Kings of the *Canaanites*, who had confederated against them, because they had made a League with *Israel*, as we read *Jos. x.*

WE see here what an Obligation the *Israelites* laid upon themselves to spare the *Gibeonites*; and the League which was made between them, was held sacred and inviolable, till *Saul* broke through it. But before we can make a due estimate of his Sin in violating it, we must endeavour to answer three Exceptions, which may be made to the validity of the Oath which *Joshua* and *Israel* made to the *Gibeonites*. 1. Whether an Oath obtained by such fraud be binding. 2. Whether it was not made void by an Antecedent Obligation. 3. How it could be binding to their Posterity.

To the first I answer, That a promissory Oath shall bind him that makes it, though obtained by Fraud, if the Matter of it be lawful. For he should have taken care to have discovered the Fraud, before he bound himself with the Oath. But if through his weakness or negligence, a Fraud has past upon him, yet he shall rather sustain the damage of it, than profane the awful name of God to relieve himself. In this case we may apply that rule of Holy Scripture, *Let God be true, and every man a Liar*. If all the World cheats us, we must resolve to maintain the Reverence and Sanctity of God's name. The Princes of *Israel* knew very well that they had been circumvented by the *Gibeonites* stratagem, to their own disadvantage; but they told their People they had no power to touch them, *because*, said they, *we have sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel*.

To the second Exception, That this Oath seems null and void by virtue of a former Law which God gave to *Israel*, that they should make no league with any of the old Inhabitants of *Canaan*; I confess there are several passages in the Books of *Moses*, which speak very positively to this purpose; and if they prove absolute Commands, then nothing less than a new Revelation or Concession from

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from God himself, could make such a League valid, though confirmed by the most solemn Oath; because the first Law must stand good, till mollified or abrogated by the same Authority. But the *Jewish* Doctors are generally of Opinion, that their fore-fathers were at liberty to spare any of the devoted Nations, provided they would renounce their Idolatry, and embrace the Worship of the true God, and pay tribute. *Maimonides* and *Moses Kotzenfis* say, that the Law, *Deut. xx. 10.* When thou comest nigh to a City to fight against it, first proclaim peace to it, was to be observed towards *Canaanites* as well as others; though some *Jews* are of a different Opinion. However, this is most certain, that the most ancient *Jews* held it lawful to spare *Canaanites* in some Cases, as we are certified not only from this History of the *Gibeonites*, but likewise in the case of *Rahab* the Harlot, and of many *Amorites*, *Hittites*, and others, remaining in *Israel* to the days of *Solomon*, whom that King would not destroy, though he was powerful enough to do it, but only levied a tribute of Bond-service upon them, *1 Kings ix. 21.* Nay the *Gergesites*, who surrendered to *Israel* at their first coming into *Canaan*, had a Posterity remaining even to the time of our Blessed Lord, *Matt. viii. 28.* We see then that the *Israelites* were not so peremptorily obliged to destroy the *Canaanites*, but that upon some conditions they might spare them, and therefore an Oath to that purpose was justly binding.

To the third Quere, Whether the Oath of one Generation of Men shall bind their Successors, I answer, Not in all Cases; but there were two reasons why this Oath should be binding to Posterity; 1. Because it was made a part of their Law, and therefore became obligatory to *Saul*, as much as it was to *Joshua*. 2. Because it was the security given to the *Gibeonites*, that they might dwell with *Israel*

in Peace and Safety; which must in reason be extended to their Posterity, otherwise it would not have been worth their while to have solicited for, or complied with the aforesaid League.

AND thus we have found that *Joshua* had power to make a League with the *Gibeonites*, and ratifie it with an Oath; and that the same League and Oath were equally binding to *Saul*, as they were to *Joshua*. And therefore we conclude, that *Saul*, by slaying and labouring to extirpate the *Gibeonites*, involved himself and his People in the guilt of Perjury and Murder.

AND it was so much the more inexcusable in *Saul* to commit this Violence, because it lookt as if he were resolved in all things to contradict the Sacred Law. When he was commanded utterly to destroy *Amalek*, he spared their King and their Cattle, which he should have destroyed. When he was forbidden to slay the *Gibeonites*, he employed all the power he had, to extinguish them. By which hardness and contempt of God's Word, he left a heavy reckoning to be satisfied by his own Posterity, as we shall now see, by considering in the

III^d and last place, the Means which *David* used for the removal of the Famine. He delivered two of *Saul's* Sons and five of his Grandsons into the Hands of the *Gibeonites*, who hanged them up unto the Lord, *i. e.* to appease his Anger, and vindicate his Honour, in *Gibeah* of *Saul*, *i. e.* his hereditary Town, to aggravate the reproach and scandal of their Sufferings.

NOW here it will presently be demanded, Where is the justice of hanging up the Children for the iniquity of their Parents, so expressly contrary to the *Jews* Law, *Deut. xxiv. 16.* where it is said, *The Fathers shall not be put to death for the Children, neither shall the Children be put to death for the Fathers;*

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thers: every Man shall be put to death for his own Sin. And this is vouched by the practice of *Amaziah* King of *Judah*, who when he executed his Servants, who had assassinated King *Jeboash* his Father, he spared their Children in reverence to this Law, 2 *Kings* xiv. 6.

BUT it is as easie to answer this objection as to make it: For this Law was enacted to regulate the proceedings in the ordinary Courts of Justice, but not to tye up the hands of the Almighty in extraordinary Cases. It was very reasonable that bounds should be set to human Passions, and that Men should not carry their revenge farther than the person of the Offender; but God, who is the supreme Legislator, is free to make the exception when he pleases, according to that prerogative which he has reserved to himself of visiting the iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children. And this Execution of *Saul's* Sons by the *Gibeonites* being directed by him, is a matter of special Revelation, and therefore a just exception from the general rule aforesaid.

I confess the words of the Sacred Text say nothing of God's Direction about this Execution, but only that *David* delivered seven of *Saul's* Sons to the *Gibeonites*, upon their demand of that Number. But I think we may fairly collect from the scope of the Words, that God directed the whole Affair. For as soon as *David* returned from enquiring of God, he presently called the *Gibeonites*, and askt them what would satisfie them so far, that they would forgive his People, and pray for them. In which we cannot doubt but he followed the instructions which God had given him, otherwise it would have been strange to leave it to them to take what Revenge they saw fit. *Josephus* says expressly, that God commanded *David* to refer this to the *Gibeonites*. And if so, I will venture to add, that he put
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it into their Hearts to make such demand as they did. And so the whole Dispensation was of God, who signified his acceptance of what was done, by sending Rain presently after it, and granting a plentiful encrease of the fruits of the Earth.

Now the Application which we are most naturally led to make of what has been said, is briefly this. Let us, in all our worldly Affairs, be very careful, and very well advised, how we contract for, or promise any thing upon Oath; that the matter of it may not only be lawful, but likewise expedient for us, that so we may be under no Temptation of breaking Faith, or performing less than we have promised. The happy circumstances of expediency and advantage will make us most safe and easie under such an Obligation. But if at any time we are called to give the security of an Oath in a lawful Matter, which is in our power to perform, though we should afterwards discover great hardships which we have brought upon our selves, either through our own inadvertency to the terms of it, or the unfair dealing of those to whom it is made, yet let us pay that honour and reverence to the awful name of God which we called upon, as for his sake to keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right. Let us not be tempted, by our own loss and our Adversary's gain, to make shipwreck of that which is the only true comfort of Life, I mean, a good Conscience; which when we have lost, we are continually obnoxious to God's Indignation, who if he should spare us in our own Persons, yet he can punish us, as he did *Saul*, in our Posterity; for this, we see, is one of the Sins of Parents which God visits upon their Children. And therefore as we tender the Welfare of our present and future Descendents, let us abstain from Falshood and Wrong, doing violence to no Man in Body, Goods, or Name, as knowing the Judgments

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ments of God against them who are so injurious; but constantly maintain Faith and a good Conscience towards all Mankind, remembering the encouragement which *David* gives to the righteous Man, that *he never saw such a one forsaken, nor his seed begging their Bread*; and that whatever damage he may sustain by a religious observance of his Oath, yet he shall gain this advantage by it in the end, that he shall ascend far above this faithless World, and for ever dwell in the presence of the God of Truth and Justice. To whom, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be all Honour, &c.



SERMON



SERMON XXX.

On the Eighth Sunday after TRINITY.



I KINGS xiii. i.

And behold there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel, and Jeroboam stood by the Altar to burn Incense.

IN the two former Chapters we have an account of the division of *Israel* and *Judah* into two Kingdoms, which happened upon this occasion: King *Solomon*, though he was a Prince of incomparable wit and learning, yet he committed two fatal errors in his Government, which very much lessened him in the esteem and love of God and Man; one was, that he married many Wives out of strange idolatrous Nations, which was expressly forbidden by the Law of *Moses*, for fear lest such marriages should bring in idolatry, as indeed they did very grossly in this case. For *Solomon* being more concerned to gratify his Wives than

than to please God, built high Places and Altars for their respective Worship, and joined with them in it, as some think; though if he did but allow them, this was enough to provoke God, as being a notorious contempt of his Law, in a case wherein his honour was most highly concerned. 2dly, Provision for these Wives obliged the King to burden many of his People with such work and service as they thought fit to exact of them, and to load others with heavy Taxes to defray the charges of their high living, and costly superstitions and sacrifices; whereby the People grew weary of his Government, and were disposed to forsake him, and to follow any new Head, who would undertake, upon probable grounds, to be their Deliverer.

SUCH were *Solomon's* Errors in Government, such as lost him the Love of God and his People, and made way for the revolt of *Israel* from his Family. For as soon as ever his reign was ended, *Israel* was resolved to treat with his successor for better usage, and made their humble application to him, that he would remit of their hard service, and unbind the heavy yoke which *Solomon* had put upon their necks. But when *Rehoboam* absolutely refused to alleviate any thing of former Impositions, all *Israel* with one voice renounced their allegiance to him, and chose *Jeroboam* for their King, who was a very valiant and very industrious Man, a great favourite of King *Solomon*, who raised him to great preferment, and set him over the whole Province of *Ephraim* and *Manasseh*, and imployed him much in the ordering and directing his magnificent buildings.

THIS long concern with publick affairs gave *Jeroboam* an opportunity both to enrich himself, and also to get a great reputation for his capacity

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ty to govern; so that when *Israel* was resolved to have a new King, their eyes were with one consent turned upon him, as the fittest Person to be set at the head of them.

BUT there was another motive which induced the *Israelites* to be unanimous in their choice of *Jeroboam* for their King, and that was a Revelation which God had made long before by the Prophet *Abijah*, that the time was coming when *Jeroboam* should reign over the ten Tribes of *Israel*. This we read chap. xi. of this Book, That when *Jeroboam* was servant to King *Solomon*, one day as he went out of *Jerusalem*, *Abijah* met him in the field, and took from him a new Robe which he had just put on, and rent it in twelve pieces, bidding him take ten, as an earnest and prognostick from God, that he was about to rend the ten Tribes of *Israel* from the house of *David*, and would give them to *Jeroboam* to reign over them. And he tells him what it was that had provoked God to do this: *Because,* says he, *Solomon and his House have forsaken me; and worshipped Ashtaroath, and Chemosh; and Milcom; and have not walked in my Statutes to do that which is right in my eyes. Therefore I will take ten Tribes from his Son, and will give them to thee, and thou shalt be King over Israel. And if thou wilt hearken to all that I command thee, and wilt keep my Statutes, as David my servant did, then I will build thee a sure house, as I built for him, and will give Israel unto thee.*

NOW though we must suppose that an affair of this nature was cautiously and privately transacted between *Abijah* and *Jeroboam*, as indeed their safety required, being both subjects to King *Solomon*, yet it was not long a secret: *Solomon* quickly knew of it, and banished *Jeroboam* upon that account; which was but the way to make it more publick, and we cannot doubt but all *Israel*

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rael was apprized of it; which caused them, at *Solomon's* decease, to send for *Jeroboam* out of his Banishment, and to fulfill the Prophecy, by making him their King.

WE have heard, that the reason why the Kingdom of *Israel* was rent from the House of *David*, was the Polytheism or variety of superstition introduced by *Solomon's* Wives, and countenanced by himself. This was fully declared to *Jeroboam*, with a caution given him to avoid the like Impiety, and a promise brought him from God, that if he would walk in his ways, and do that which is right in his sight, he would establish the Kingdom in his Family, and continue it to his late Posterity.

THIS makes it the more strange and inexcusable in him to dishonour God so shamefully as he did, by one of the first acts of his Government.

FOR no sooner was he well got into the throne, but as if God had laid no manner of obligation nor injunction upon him, he presently violated the Divine Laws, by the following Innovation.

IT is a well-known Command of God to *Israel*, that every year, three times a year, all their Males should go up to *Jerusalem* to offer sacrifice and to worship him. 'Now, says *Jeroboam*, if 'this People should continue to observe this custom, the repeated sight of their royal City, and 'the venerable face of Religion there, which has 'been established by *David* and *Solomon*, will revive in them a tender affection and esteem for 'that Family, to whom they will one day reconcile themselves, by making a sacrifice of me and 'mine.' Hereupon he advised with his secular Politicians, who were nothing so much concerned for the purity of Religion, as for the preservation of their civil Government: And the result of their Counsel was this; That they would not
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go out of their own Tribes for the exercise of their Religion, but left it to their new King *Jeroboam* to appoint what places he pleased for the holding of their Religious Assemblies. Accordingly he ordered Accommodations to be made for them in *Dan* and *Bethel*, two Cities in the outmost coasts of *Israel*, the first in the North, and the other in the South Part of the Kingdom: Here he planted Groves, and built Altars, and erected the figures of two golden Calves in Temples which he dedicated to them, and constituted Priests of his own chusing, out of any Tribe or Family, for the House of *Aaron* and Tribe of *Levi* refused to serve him in his new model of Religion. When he had made this provision, he assembled the People together, and recommended his new Constitution to them in the following Oration, as *Josephus* represents it:

‘ My Friends, I presume you are not ignorant,
 ‘ that the Deity fills all Places, and cannot be circumscribed or confined in one more than another;
 ‘ but is every where present with his devout Worshipers, hearing their Prayers, and accepting their Services. For which reason I think we may
 ‘ well dispense with the charge and trouble of journeys to *Jerusalem*, a City not only at a great distance from us, but now become our mortal Enemy. For what is their celebrated Temple, but
 ‘ the work of Men’s Hands? We all remember the building of it. I had as much power to consecrate two Golden Calves, as I have done, to be
 ‘ Emblems of the Deity, which I have placed in *Dan* and *Bethel*, that you may resort to either of
 ‘ these places for divine Worship, according as they shall happen to be nearest to your Habitations. And that you may not cry, who shall give
 ‘ us of the Sons of *Aaron*, and Tribe of *Levi* for the service of our Altars, I will authorize any of you
 ‘ to

to minister in Holy Things. Whosoever among you has a mind to the Sacred Function, let him but offer to God a Bullock and a Ram, as *Aaron* is said to have done at his Consecration, and he shall be qualified to become a Priest.

By such persuasions and pretences of convenience and advantage, *Jeroboam* diverted the ten Tribes of *Israel* from going up to *Jerusalem*, at the times appointed by the Divine Law. And though his reasoning himself into this Innovation, as we heard before, betrayed his distrust of God, who had solemnly engaged to prosper him in case he would keep his Laws, and upon whose promise he had the greatest reason to depend, as knowing that it was God who had raised him to be King; yet we can give some account of this Conduct, we see the worldly Politician in it; we know it is very agreeable to their ways, who leave God, and follow their own understanding in providing for themselves.

But to me it seems wholly unaccountable why he should erect the figures of Golden Calves in his new Temples. For besides the impropriety of that Figure, so far as I can guess, to represent any thing that is Divine, one would think the *Jews*, who must needs know from *Exod. xxxii.* what happened to their Fore-fathers in the Wilderness, should evermore abominate the Image of a golden Calf. And yet we see *Jeroboam* had the Confidence, not only to set them up in his Temples; but to present them to the People, in the very same form of Words which *Aaron* had presented his before. *These be thy Gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the Land of Egypt.* And the People believed him, and attested their Faith by a long course of Worship. Which is very astonishing, when we consider and must take it for granted, that they were generally well instructed in the knowledge of the true God, and knew what an infamy it brought upon the

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memory of their Wickedness, That they turned the glory of the invisible God, into the similitude of a Gold Idol, that bare his Image.

Now at the first Feast of Tabernacles which happened after Jeroboam became King of Israel, to give reputation to this worship of his own devising, though it had been a peculiar crime at Jerusalem, yet it was but of a piece with the new constitution at Bethel, that the King himself ascended up to the Altar, to perform the Office of High-priest, being attended by several inferior Priests, of no greater Authority than what they derived from him.

And when he was just ready to offer Sacrifice, and to burn Incense in the sight of the People, a Prophet, whom Josephus calls Jaton, sent by God from Jerusalem, in that moment presented himself before the King, and after he had for a while looked withally upon him, he turned to the Altar, and thus exclaimed: O *Upharaz, Altar, thus saith the Lord, a Son of the House of David, Josiah by name, shall burn upon thee the bones of false Prophets, Deceivers and Seducers.* And to persuade all that hear me, that this shall come to pass, Behold, this Altar shall break immediately, and the ashes and fat of the sacrifices which it contains, shall fall to the ground.

This was no sooner said than done. But Jeroboam, before he perceived it, being transported with indignation at the boldness of the Man, offered to lay hold of him. But the Arm which he stretcht out, was instantly struck lame, and the sinews of it so dried and contracted, that he could not pluck it in again, which gave a turn to his Passion, and caused him to beg the Prophet's Prayers to God, that his Arm might be restored to its usual Vigor and Soundness. His request was immediately granted; which obliged him so, that he was very courteous to the Prophet, and importuned him to dine with him, and accept of a Reward. But the Prophet

excused

excused himself by telling him, that God had forbidden him to eat or drink in that idolatrous City, or to return by the same way that he came. And having said this, he departed.

BUT there dwelt an old Prophet in *Bethel*; one who had been many Years a Prophet in *Israel* before this Apostasie; *Josephus* thinks he was in favour with *Jeroboam*, as dealing smoothly with him in all his Proceedings. This Man's Sons having heard and seen all that the Prophet from *Jerusalem* did to *Jeroboam* and his Altar, they came and told it in order to their Father. And he fearing lest the King should have a greater opinion of this stranger than of himself, commanded his Sons presently to saddle his Ass, and having learned of them which way the Man of God went, he followed, and overtook him, as he was reposing himself under an Oak. After Salutations past, he told him he must needs return with him to the City, and eat Bread at his House. And when the Man of God refused for the reason aforesaid, the old Prophet answered, 'You may safely eat with me, for I am a Man of the same Spirit and Principles with your self; and I came after you now by the direction of an Angel of God, who charged me to fetch you back, and to give you some Entertainment. For though you may not enter in to the House of any Idolaters, to countenance them in their Impiety, yet I who am a Prophet of the true God, am not comprehended in that Prohibition. You have leave to dine with me; therefore come back with me.'

THESE confident asseverations of the old Prophet, persuaded *Jadon* that he spoke truth, and thereupon he accepted of his Invitation. But while they sat at the Table, the word of the Lord came to the old Prophet, who in great agony and astonishment

nishment was forced to denounce to *Jadon*, that he had disobeyed the word of the Lord, and therefore should never be buried in the Sepulcher of his Fathers: which threatening was executed upon him the same day. For in the Afternoon, as he was all alone upon the Road towards *Jerusalem*, a Lion rusht out of a Wood upon him and slew him. And when he had so done, he stood very still and quiet, neither meddling with the Carcass, nor the Ass that carried him, nor the Passengers that came that way and looked on; which shewed that this Lion had his Commission from God, which he could not exceed, being sent only to kill the disobedient Prophet, but to do no more.

WHEN the News of his death was told in *Bethel*, and came to the ears of the old Prophet, he readily acknowledged the Hand of God in it, and fetcht the Body, and with great Decency and Lamentation buried it in his own Sepulcher, charging his Sons, that when he died, they should deposite him in the same Grave, and telling them that what he had cried against the Altar in *Bethel*, and against the Priests and High Places in *Samaria*, would surely come to pass. Which is a great argument that this old Man, however he prevaricated with *Jadon*, yet was endued with a true Spirit of Prophecy.

BUT the grievous burden of all, is the impenitence of *Jeroboam*, who, like a true Politician of this World, hardened himself against all these undeniable Warnings of God, not reforming any one enormity which he had committed; but going on to make Priests of the meanest of the People, without any regard to Tribe, Family, or Condition of the Persons; but whosoever desired it, he consecrated him, and he became one of the Priests of the High Places. Which was such a flagrant dishonour

honour of God; and contempt of his Laws, that it provoked him to send dreadful Judgments upon *Jeroboam* and his People.

AND thus we have seen in three notable instances, *Solomon*, *Jeroboam*, and *Jadon*, what account God makes of our Obedience to his Commands, and what Vengeance we may justly expect for our Contempt and Violation of them.

1st, GOD promises King *Solomon*, *1 Kings vi.* that if he would walk in his Statutes, execute his Judgments, and keep all his Commandments, then, says he, *I will perform my word unto thee, which I spake unto David thy Father*; which was, that he would Establish the Throne of his Kingdom for ever, *2 Sam. vii. 13.* And so long as *Solomon* was the Guardian of true Religion, God was true and faithfull to his promise, blessing him with immense Riches, Plenty, and Power, and making Peace in all his Borders. But when in his advanced years he degenerated into an Idolater and Oppressor, the bright Sunshine of his Prosperity was obscured, many Adversaries rose up against him, who gave him great disturbance; he had the mortification to hear from God by the mouth of his Prophets, that the Kingdom of *Israel* should be taken from his Son, and be given to his Servant; and lastly, he departed out of this Life under a great diminution of that Fame and Reputation, which he had acquired in the former part of his Reign.

2^{dly}, *Jeroboam* was manifestly raised by the Providence of God from a low estate to be King of *Israel*, and upon condition of his Obedience had as large assurances given him of the Divine favour, as had been given to his Master *Solomon*. But he had so much of worldly Wisdom in him, that he could not trust his Creator and Benefactor. He thought he reasoned most justly, and so indeed he did,

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did, according to human views, when he restrained his *Israelites* from resorting to *Jerusalem*, and provided for their whole worship in his own Dominions: And when he perswaded them to be content, because God was Omnipresent, and as near them at *Dan* and *Bethel* as at *Jerusalem*; and that he was no Respector of Persons, but would accept the ministry of Priests of other Families, as well as those of the Tribe of *Levi*; these were plausible Arguments, and would no doubt be urged with great vehemence by Free-thinkers and Reasoners, of any Age or Religion whatever. And for any thing I find, the *Israelites* under this new regulation, were as just and temperate, as exact in all relative Duties, and every way as moral men, as the men of *Judah*. So that if it were the whole business of Religion, as many would have it thought, to be subservient only to the Welfare and good Order of Mankind, *Israel* with their New Religion might be in as good a condition, as *Judah* with their Old. But because *Jarobam's* Institution violated several positive Laws of God, therefore the alteration which he made, is constantly imputed to him as a very heinous Sin, and such as proved very calamitous to himself and his People. For however our Libertines would have it pass for a general maxim, that mankind are born only to provide for their Temporal happiness, and that such Religion is best, whoever instituted it, which is most adapted to that end; yet we find by manifold testimonies of Sacred writ, as well as passages of other History, that God will be acknowledged and glorified by the Obedience of men; and if we pretend to treat any part of his revealed Will as a superficial matter, of no good use or advantage to us; by such a treatment we charge infinite Wisdom with weakness, we highly dishonour him, and he will severely reckon with us for the contempt.

THERE

THAT there is no Religion but what should have the true God for its Author, as well as for its End and Object; for which reason we ought to express the greatest veneration for every thing that he has revealed to us. For will we call any thing unnecessary, or ease to be dispensed with, which God has made known this way to us? Is not He the sole Object of our worship? and is not He the fittest to prescribe the exercise and acts of our Piety, and best able to judge what will please him? It is enough for us to be satisfied that God has enjoined us any thing as a Duty; we have no right to censure and debate the Expediency of it, but to pay it that honour which is due from the meanest Servants to the highest Lord, and that is, to perform it with an exact and ready Obedience.

HAD this been well considered by the Prophet, who was sent of God to cry against *Jeroboam's* Altar in *Bethel*, he had not been our third instance of God's displeasure against Disobedience. For he delivered the Message he was sent upon, with great Courage and Constancy, in the presence of the King and all his People; and as bravely refused to accept of the Royal Present and Entertainment. But being over-perswaded by the old Prophet of *Bethel*, (who feigned he had a Revelation for it) to come to his House, he failed in that Circumstance of his Obedience, and lost his Life by it. His error was this, in neglecting God's command revealed to himself, of which he was very certain, and trusting the old Prophet about a contrary Revelation, of which he could not be certain, and which indeed proved but a Fiction. Here was his fault; and therefore it was said emphatically to him, *Because thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord.* For if God had thought fit to recall his Word, he would have intimated it to the Prophet himself: According to

the rule which *Abarbinel* lays down in this case; Nothing, says he, that a Prophet receives from God, is to be altered, unless that Prophet has another word from God revoking the former. This is intended for a warning to us all, that we be careful to hearken to God rather than men; and that we suffer not any confident man to argue and dispute us out of the meaning of any part of God's word, when the Sense of it is once plain and clear to us. I doubt not but the Prophet's punishment was thus memorably severe, on purpose to imprint the instruction I have recommended, upon all our Hearts. For he was far less culpable than the two Kings before mentioned; who yet died in their beds, while he was slain by a Lyon: but then his happiness above them was this, that here ended all his Punishment, both in this World and that which is to come. Thus much God caused the Lyon by dumb signs to declare; for when he had taken his Life, he neither hurt his Body any farther, nor suffered any thing else to touch it; but stood by it as its Protector, till it was fetched away to a decent Burial. And we have heard what a strict charge the old Prophet laid upon his Sons to bury him in the same Grave; and we read afterwards, *2 Kings xxiii.* that when King *Josiah* fulfilled his Prophecy, by burning dead mens bones upon *Jeroboam's* Altar, being informed which was his Grave, he suffered no man to disturb his remains, which shewed the watchfulness of Divine Providence over him.

I shall conclude with observing how much the circumstances of this Prophecy tend to prove the Divine Authority of Holy Scripture. It is here foretold, that a Son of the House of David, *Josiah* by name, shall burn mens bones upon the Altar at *Bethel*. And how punctually this was fulfilled, we read in the History of *Josiah*, *2 Kings xxiii.* Now
between

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between this Prediction and the accomplishment of it, there passed three hundred sixty two years: So that it was first pronounced at a time when in all human probability it could never come to pass, For *Jeroboam* was just now established King over the ten Tribes of *Israel*, whereby he was much Superior in military Forces to the House of *David*. And *Bethel* was a City of his jurisdiction, no ways likely to fall into the hands of the old Royal Family; which yet must happen, before a Prince of the House of *David* could pollute his new-erected Altar there. But what can human powers avail, when the hand of God interposes to give them a turn? It was in the reign of this very *Jeroboam*, that *Ahijah* son of *Rheboam*, King of *Judah*, waging War with him, beat him with just half the number of men, and took many Cities and Towns from him, and among the rest, this very *Bethel*, the City of the Golden Calf, as we read 2 *Chron.* xiii. 19. So that presently the Altar was in the power of the Kings of *Judah*, to use it as they pleased. But the decree of God was, that *Josiah* should pollute it and abolish it, who came not into the World till several years after *Israel* was carried into Captivity by *Salmaneser* the *Assyrian*; so that he had none of that Nation left to oppose him, or question him for what he did to it.

THIS Prediction, I say, is set forth in such particular circumstances, as nothing but the wisdom of God could delineate so long before hand. For he alone sees things that are not, as though they were actually existing; whereas the subtillest of his Creatures can but make random conjectures at things which are much nearer the birth. This Prophecy therefore is a noble Argument, that the whole Book was written by the Inspiration of the Spirit of God; and though there are many

many other good uses to be made of it, which I have touched upon, yet it well deserved to be recorded, had it been for no other end, but to confirm our Faith in the Word of God.

LET us therefore praise God, for giving us such incontestable evidence, that he spake in times past to the Jews by his Prophets; and much more, that he hath spoken to us Christians of these later Days by his Son, who has given us no less Demonstrations, by his foretelling of future things, that the Word of God was with him. Let this dispose us to reverence this awful Word in both Testaments, and not only to be Hearers, but Doors of it, that finally we may be numbered with the Holy Prophets and Apostles, by whom it was spoken and written, under our common Lord and Head Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth, &c.



SERMON



SERMON XXXI.

On the Ninth Sunday after TRINITY.



I KINGS xviii. 17, 18.

And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah, that he said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy Father's House, in that ye have forsaken the Commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.



UCH were the mutual Salutations that passed between the King of *Israel*, and one of his best Counsellors, at a juncture which required much to be done for the relief of the Kingdom; which had now groaned under a Drought, and a Famine consequent thereupon, for three Years and six Months. And no doubt but all the Inhabitants were sorely afflicted, and multitudes perished through want of the Fruits of the Earth: as for the Cattle, they had no Grass to feed upon, but such as grew by the sides

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sides of Fountains, Brooks, and Rivers, and was grown such a rare Commodity, that the King himself went in search of it.

AT the same time he made most diligent enquiry after the Prophet *Elijah*, not only in his own Dominions, but likewise in all the neighbouring Nations that were at peace and amity with him. And when they affirmed that he was not among them, he required them to declare upon Oath, that they knew nothing of him.

WHAT could be the reason, that *Ahab* was so concerned to find out a Man for whom he had such an Aversion, as appears in several passages of his History? He could have no favour to confer upon him. Did he intend to punish him? This does not appear to have been his Design, till after the matters recorded in this Chapter were over, when he told *Jezabel* how *Elijah* had slain all the Prophets of *Baal*, whereupon she swore by her Gods to send him out of the World as a Sacrifice to their Ghosts. But at the interview mentioned in my Text, *Ahab* seems not to have had any design upon the life of *Elijah*. The reason then of his strict enquiry after him, I take to be this: While *Ahab* was in the career of his Impieties, exceeding all the Kings of *Israel* that went before him, *Elijah* came boldly into his Presence, and having sharply reproved him for his grievous Violations of God's Laws, told him, that as a just Judgment upon him and his People, there should be a long drought in the Land, accompanied with a Famine, and that not so much as a shower of Rain, or the least Dew should fall, till *Ahab* and he should meet again; and that he might believe that this was the Word and Will of God, he confirmed what he had said with a solemn Oath, and immediately departed, and concealed himself, sojourning in remote and private Places for three Years and a half,

half, as both our Saviour, *Luke iv.* and *St. James, Chap. v.* have taught us to compute the time; though it is not expressly denoted in the History before us.

Now *Ahab*, 'tis likely, despised the Prophet's threatening for some time, as such wicked Tyrants are too apt to do; but when he found that it was executed, and had lain upon them for a good while, and that none of his Prophets of *Baal*, or of the Groves, could procure Rain, though he hated *Elijah* in the general, yet he very much longed to meet him again, as well remembering his last Words, and hoping that he would revoke the interdict and curse which he had laid on the Land.

THIS was the reason which moved *Ahab* to make such diligent search after *Elijah*; and when he had found him, he falls to expostulating with him in very sower and angry Language; *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* One might see by this blunt and sullen beginning, that the King was no friend to the Prophet, nor his Religion. Whereas *Obadiah*, the Steward of his House, had a little before discovered his own good Affections, by a respectful and courteous Salutation, *Art thou my Lord Elijah?* And yet this was no greater civility than what was commonly paid to the Prophets of God; for though they were often Men of but poor Circumstances, and mean Appearance, yet out of respect to their Sanctity, and in honour to God, whose immediate Messengers and Heralds they were, the greatest Princes gave them the style of *Lord* and *Father*, when they spoke to them. But *Ahab* was one of those who knew how to tell God's Minister that he despised his Religion, by treating his Person with an air of haughtiness and contempt. *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* Can such a pitiful, inconsiderable Fellow as you are, bring so much Mischief upon a whole Nation? No truly, replies the Prophet

Prophet, with a just courage and assurance, ' This ' Evil is not from me, but from your self and your ' Father's House.' And how much they deserved this charge, will appear from a short view of their History.

OMRI, the Father of *Ahab*, of what Tribe is uncertain, was a Soldier in the Army of *Israel*, in their Wars under their King *Elah*. But when *Zimri*, Captain of *Elah's* Chariots, had conspired against this King his Master, and slain him, intending to reign in his stead, the Army not approving of what he had done, made *Omri* their King in the Camp; and under his conduct they besieged *Zimri* in the City *Tinnah* so straitly, that he was burned in his Palace there, on the seventh day of his Reign. However this did not quite clear *Omri's* Way to the Throne of *Israel*. For a great body of the People not consenting to the military Election which had been made of him in the Camp, divided from the rest, and chose *Tibni*, a valiant Man, who seems to have succeeded *Zimri* in his command of the Chariots. Hereupon a Battel ensued between the two Parties, in which *Tibni* fell, as having the weaker Army, and then *Omri* reigned over all *Israel*, without a Rival.

His Reign, which lasted twelve Years, was memorable for two things. One was, that he built *Samaria*, and made it the Royal City of the Kingdom of *Israel*. The other was, that in matters of Religion he was worse than any of his Predecessors; for he not only walked in the ways of *Jeroboam*, but made some addition to his Sin, by those Laws which the Prophet *Micah* calls the Statutes of *Omri*, *Mic. vi. 16.* whereby either some new Idolatry was introduced; or the old augmented and improved.

IN all which he shewed himself very unmindful of God's Mercies, who had raised him from a private

vine Estate, and carried him through much Opposition, till he was settled upon the Throne of *Israel*. And it was a farther aggravation of his impiety, that having seen how the Houses of *Jerobam*, and of *Baasha*, were cut off for their Idolatry, and heard the constant threatenings of God by his Prophets on that account, yet he would chuse to walk in the same odious and accursed ways.

BUT his Son and Successor *Zabab* exceeded him in his Provocations of God, in far as *Omsi* had exceeded all his Predecessors. For as if it had been but a small matter to affront God with the Sin of *Jerobam*, he went (expressly contrary to God's Law in that behalf) and took to Wife the Daughter of *Eth-baal*, or *Ithobalus*, as other Historians call him, King of the *Tyrians* and *Sidonians*, a Woman of incorrigible Pride and Insolence, who quickly filled *Israel* with her Witchcrafts and Idolatries, in so much that she entertained eight hundred and fifty Priests, as her own Chaplains, viz. four hundred and fifty for the Temples of *Baal*, and four hundred for the service of the Groves and High Places.

AND now all *Israel* was so much over-run with strange Gods, that it lookt as if every Town whereof was a *Tyre* and *Sidon*. The *Phenician Baal* was the great name that was invocated, and his zealous votary the Queen had made room for him, by throwing down the Altars of the Lord God of *Israel*, and slaying his Prophets with the Sword. So there were some Martyrs and Confessors for true Religion, though the main body of the People complied, as they do in all Ages, with the Religion of their supream Governours.

AT this juncture it was that God raised up the Prophet *Elijah*, of whose Pedigree we have no farther account, but that he was a *Tishbite*, i. e. a native of *Tishbe* in *Gilead*, as *Josephus* affirms, but ended

endued with such a wonderful measure of the Spirit of God, that next after *Moses*, he was esteem'd the very chief of the Prophets.

THIS was a fit Man to tell *Ahab*, as he bravely did, when he called him the Troubler of *Israel*, that he had misplaced his Charge, and that the Royal House were the real Troublers of *Israel*, in that they had forsaken the Commandments of the Lord, and served *Baalim*. But Now therefore, says he, if you would have this Drought and Famine removed, give orders to all your Prophets of *Baal*, and of the Groves, to meet me at Mount *Carmel*, and there we will put it to a fair Tryal, whether we ought to worship your *Sidonian* God *Baal*, or the Lord God of *Israel*.

THE King, knowing that he and his People were reduced to the last necessity for want of Rain, so far complied with the Prophet's Motion, that he summoned all the Prophets of *Baal* to meet at the time and place appointed; and thought fit to countenance them with his own Presence, and many of his Courtiers. The occasion drew vast Multitudes of People together, who partly out of Curiosity, and partly out of Concern for Religion, were desirous to see the Event.

Now when they were assembled and thronged about Mount *Carmel*, *Elijah* stood up in the midst of them; and after he had lamented the unhappy State of Religion among them, and the grievous Calamities which they had drawn down upon their own Heads by worshiping of Idols, he told them he had called them together that day, to give them a demonstration who was the true God, which he proposed to do in this manner: Let us, says he, build two Altars, and lay a slain Bullock with Wood upon each Altar, but put no fire under either of them. Then let us fall to our Prayers, and beseech God to send Fire from Heaven to consume the

the sacrifice, and the God that answereth by fire, let him be esteemed and worshipped as the only true God, and the others accounted as abominations: To which the People answered, That it was a fair proposal, and they were very desirous to see it tried.

It was indeed a most ancient and well-known token that God accepted a sacrifice, if the wood on the altar that was to consume it, took fire in a miraculous way, without any human application to kindle it. Thus God is supposed to have testified his acceptance of the sacrifices of *Abel*, *Noah* and *Abraham*. Thus he certainly approved the sacrifices of *Moses*, *Gideon*, *David*, and *Solomon*. We read *Lev. ix. 24.* at the dedication of the Tabernacle, that when the Sacrifice was laid upon the Altar, and *Moses* and *Aaron* had offered up solemn Prayers to God, and blessed all the Congregation, *there came fire out from before the Lord, and consumed the burnt-offering and the fat;* which when all the People saw, they shouted for joy that God was present among them, and fell upon their faces, and worshipped him. This celestial fire was preserved by a continual supply of fuel night and day, for the service of the Altar; and was so strictly appropriated to that use, that *Nadab* and *Abihu*, Sons of *Aaron*, were struck dead for offering incense with common fire, as we read *Lev. x. 2.* When *Gideon* was entertaining an Angel of God, who came to encourage him to fight against the *Midianites*; the Angel directed him to lay the sodden kid, and cakes and broth which he had provided for him, upon the ground; which done, *he touched it with his staff, and immediately there sprung up a fire which consumed it;* whereby *Gideon* was fully perswaded that this apparition was a real messenger of God to him, *Judges vi. 20.* 3. When *David* offered an atone-

ment in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, to appease God's wrath, which he had provoked by numbring *Israel*, it is said, 1 Chr. xxi. that *the Lord answered him by fire*, i. e. this heavenly fire we are speaking of, kindled the wood upon the Altar, and consumed his sacrifice. *Lastly*, When *Solomon*, at the Consecration of his Temple, had made an end of praying, 2 Chr. vii. *fire came down from Heaven, and consumed the offerings and sacrifices which lay ready upon the Altar; and the glory of the Lord filled the House, so that the Priests could not enter into it.* And when all the Children of *Israel* saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the House, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground, and worshipped and praised the Lord.

THUS we have seen, that when fire either visibly fell from Heaven, or miraculously sprung up in the wood upon the Altar, and consumed the sacrifice, it was a known testimony of God's accepting the worship and service that was then offered him. And though the ordinary way of sacrificing was, by fire preserved and continued from such as at first fell from Heaven, as I noted before; yet upon extraordinary occasions God vouchsafed to give this miraculous evidence of his presence, and approbation of what was done.

THIS method therefore which *Elijah* made choice of, to prove the truth of Religion by it, was what he knew to be agreeable to the Will of God, and the former dispensations of his Providence. And now having the unanimous consent of the People to proceed in it, he recommended it to *Baal's* Prophets to go before him in raising their Altar, and ordering their sacrifice according to the terms agreed upon. They did so, and fell to their invocations of *Baal*, which they continued 'till noon, but without obtaining any other
answer

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answer than what *Elijah* made them, in his ironical description of their Deity. Then they ran about their Altar with ecstasick motions, and cried aloud, and cut their flesh with knives and lancets 'till the blood gusht out upon them, hoping by this means to move their God to take pity of them, and answer them. But when there was no voice, nor any token of regard given them, and the time of Evening Sacrifice was now come, they were forced to desist without success, ashamed and weary of what they had done.

THEN *Elijah* stood up, and desired of the People a reverend attention, and that they would assist him to build an Altar with twelve stones, according to the number of the Tribes of the Sons of *Jacob*. The Altar being raised, he laid his wood and his bullock for sacrifice upon it, and made a trench about it, which he filled with many Barrels of Water, 'till his Sacrifice floated in it.

HAVING put things in such order as he would have them, he addrest himself to God in Prayer, invoking him by the name of the God of *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Jacob*, beseeching him to declare himself to be the God of *Israel*, and to own his Prophet upon this occasion, and convert the hearts of his People who had erred and stray'd from his ways. Scarce had he finished this short supplication, when fire fell down from the Lord out of Heaven with such a force, that it consumed not only the flesh of the Bullock and the Wood, but the very stones and materials of the Altar, and dried up the Water that had been poured out there in great abundance. This amazing manifestation of the Divine Power struck all the People with such irresistible conviction, that they fell on their faces, and cryed out, *The God of Elijah is the true God.*

I will not here dissemble my knowledge of what occurs in some of the Pagan Writers to this purpose. Several *Greek* and *Latin* Authors make mention of Sacrifices among them which have been consumed by a spontaneous fire, kindling without natural means or human application. Neither will I say, with some learned Men, that this was a cheat of the Pagan Priests, and a counterfeiting of a true Miracle to get credit to their Superstition. For we know that the Spirits whom the heathen Writers worshipped did many strange things, sometimes without natural Means, and sometimes above them: But how far their Miracles came short of the Divine, we see in the contest between *Moses* and *Pharaoh's* Magicians. We may allow that the Dæmons have a power to kindle fire on their own Altars, without weakening the argument here before us for proof of the superior power of God: For in this instance we find, that God can wholly restrain them, whenever he pleases, and all the distress and importunity of their Adorers shall get no help of them. Here was a Question between Men of several Religions, whose was the true God; and it was agreed that He who answered by fire, should be acknowledged as such: Now if any *Phenician* Historian could give me the best assurance, that their God *Bel* or *Baal*, had very often set fire to his own sacrifice, yet I should very justly affirm him to be a false God, because when he was brought in competition with the God of *Israel*, that God restrained him, and took this way to give proof of his own superior Power.

AND therefore with good reason, and like a faithful servant of God, *Elijah* struck in with the Peoples zeal, and while the impressions of the Miracle were strong upon their minds, incited them to fall on and destroy the Prophets of *Baal*. For his God, who had just now manifested his superior

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superior Power to their utter confusion, had of old enacted a positive Law, *Deut. xiii. that Idolaters and Seducers to a false Religion should be put to death without mercy.* And never was there an occasion which more vehemently called for the execution of this Law. For these Men had not only done the greatest injury and dishonour to God, by invading the lot of his own Inheritance, the land which he had chosen to preserve his name and worship in it; but they had likewise filled this Land with his judgments, by defiling it with their abominations and lying vanities, and that their Impiety might reign triumphant, they had abrogated his Laws, thrown down his Altars, and slain his Prophets with the sword. Just and right therefore it was, that the violence which they had done to others, should be returned upon their own heads: And the justice of God was so far satisfied with this Execution, as immediately to send abundance of rain upon the thirsty Land.

AND thus the Prophet *Elijah* has fairly cleared himself from being the Author of *Israel's* Calamities, and proved them to be justly imputable to *Abab* and his idolatrous family. *I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house, in that ye have forsaken the Commandments of the Lord, and addicted yourselves and your People to the worship of strange Gods.*

FOR a native of *Israel*, descended from *Abraham*, as *Abab* was, to persecute the Religion of his most pious Ancestors, and extirpate that faith and worship of the true God, which they had so carefully settled in their family, and recommended to all generations of their posterity; for a King who is God's Vicegerent, to teach rebellion against his Maker, and violate the Divine Laws, while he exacts obedience to his own Commands; what could be more contrary to the design of his office,

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to the power wherewith he was invested, and the sublime honour and authority wherewith he was dignified? If the King of *Israel* will abuse these gifts to the service of *Baal*, the God of *Israel* will forsake him, and leave him to famish and be miserable with his helpless dumb Idols.

THE Profaneness, Blasphemy, and Idolatry of Governors, was always matter of sad consideration to the holy Prophets and servants of God, not only because his infinite Majesty was thereby publicly dishonoured, but because they saw national calamities gathering like a tempest over the Cities and Habitations of such Offenders. For they knew that none but God had power enough to punish them; and they considered that since such Governors would severely animadvert upon any of their own Subjects, who should rebel against their Persons or Government; how much more reasonable was it for their great Master in Heaven, who is infinitely jealous of his honour, to punish such of his ministers upon earth, as neglected to serve him in the stations wherein he had placed them, but abused the charge which he had given them, and perverted his Gifts to the gratifying of their own lusts, as if they had not received them at his hands.

SHALL the Persons of earthly Potentates be held so sacred, that none of their Subjects shall be suffered to live, who lift up their hand, or sharpen their tongue against them? and shall the same Potentates blaspheme, and suffer to be blasphemed, that glorious Majesty by whom and for whom they reign, and conspire to break his Laws, and banish his fear and worship out of the World, who created it that he might be feared and obeyed and worshipped in it?

CERTAINLY God who made the World, and constantly preserves it, has more right to be obeyed

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ed and glorified in it, than any the most honourable and worthy of the Sons of men, who are but his Creatures, and depend upon him both for their Being and Well-being.

LET us therefore beseech Almighty God to endue our Legislators and Governors with such a lively sense and reverend awe of his Divine Majesty, that they may seek his Glory, and cause his Name to be Sanctified in the first place; that our Religion may be purified from Atheism, Heresie, and Profaneness; that we may serve him in true Holiness and Righteousness, and all the People may praise him. This is the only sure way to make both Rulers and Subjects happy in their earthly Governments, and to fit and prepare them for the Inheritance of God's Heavenly Kingdom, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord, who there liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost ever one God World without end.





SERMON XXXII.

On the Tenth Sunday after TRINITY.



I KINGS xxi. 28, 29.

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the Evil in his days; but in his Son's days will I bring the Evil upon his House.

FOR the right understanding of these words, we must take a view of the matter of Fact which occasioned them; which was this. *Ahab* King of *Israel* had a mind to a Vineyard of one of his Subjects, *Naboth* the *Jezreelite*, because it lay hard by his Palace, and would serve him very conveniently for a Garden. In order to procure it, he speaks to *Naboth* about it, offering him either a better in exchange for it, or the full value of it in ready money. *Naboth* gives him a peremptory, and in appearance too blunt a denial. But indeed
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it was founded upon the Law, which prohibited the alienation of a patrimony from one Tribe or Family to another; except in case of great Poverty, when a man might sell, but not out-right, for it was to return to him again at the *Jubilee*. See *Levit. xxv.* Now *Naboth*, as he was not necessitous, so he considered, that if he should part with his Estate to gratifie the King, it would be made part of the Royal Seat, and he should never recover it again.

A H A B could not be denied a thing, that he had so much set his Heart upon, without resenting it very grievously, and losing his Rest and his Appetite with the vexation of it. His Wife *Jezebel* understanding the cause of his disorder, first upbraids him with too much condescension. ‘Is this like a King, to stand chaffering with your Subjects, whom you should rather command absolutely, and make your Will your Law? How should the great Affairs of the Kingdom go according to your mind, if you are baffled in so small a matter as this?’ Then she bids him set his Heart at rest, assuring him that she would speedily put him in possession of the Vineyard which had been denied him. And how will she accomplish this? Why, she writes Letters and seals them with the Royal Signet, to give them full Authority, and then dispatches them away to the Magistrates and Governors of *Jezreel*, the City where *Naboth* dwelt, commanding them in the first place to proclaim a Fast, thereby to alarm the Peoples minds with some horrid Plot or Conspiracy: and then on the Fast-day, when they were assembled together, to set *Naboth* in the midst of them, and procure two witnesses, suborned and instructed beforehand, to swear Blasphemy and Treason against him. Either of which was a Capital Crime; but she put them together, to make sure work;

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work: That for his Blasphemy against God the People might rise up with the greater indignation, and stone him; and for his Treason against the King his Estate might be forfeited to him, against whose Crown and Dignity he had offended.

ALL this was speedily executed, as *Jezabel* had contrived. Her commands met with a ready Obedience from a profligate set of Officers. And in a few days she congratulated *Ahab* upon the News from *Jezreel*, that *Naboth* had been stoned to death there for Blasphemy and Treason, and that he had now nothing else to do, but go and take possession of the Vineyard, which was become his own by right of Confiscation.

How far *Ahab* was privy to this villainous contrivance of his Wife, it doth not fully appear; some think he was wholly ignorant of it. But the contrary seems to be sufficiently intimated by what follows. For the Prophet *Elijah*, by a special Commission from God, gives him the meeting within the walls of his newly-acquired Vineyard, and accosts him with these words; *Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy Posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel. And I will make thy House like the House of Jeroboam the Son of Nebat, and like the House of Baasha the son of Abijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to Anger, and made Israel to sin. And of Jezabel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezabel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dies of Ahab in the City, the dogs shall eat; and him that dies in the field shall the fowls of the Air eat.*

How could *Ahab* bear all this in the presence of his great Officers, from an old man in a hair-cloth

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cloth and a leathern girdle, who had lately incurr'd his displeasure by the Slaughter of *Baal's* Priests, and was fled for it, and now the first time he appears in his presence, devotes every limb of his Family to the Brutes? *Abab* stormed at first, and began to pour out fierce Language; *Hast thou found me, O mine Enemy!* But when the Prophet was not in the least abashed with his looks or words, but leisurely and gravely pronounced the dreadful Sentence of God upon him; then his Spirits sunk, he was struck dumb, he tore off his Royal Garments, put on hair-cloth in their stead, made his bed of the same, forbid any Table to be spread for him as usual, and eat only of the coarsest Food, and that very sparingly, till he was reduced to a Skeleton, and grown so feeble, that he could scarce set one foot before another, and had no manner of Heart to go about any business. Then the word of the Lord came to *Elijah*, saying: *Seest thou how Abab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the Evil in his days; but in his Son's days will I bring the Evil upon his House.*

I N discoursing upon which Words I shall consider,

- I. THE heinousness of *Abab's* Sin.
- II. HIS Humiliation for it.
- III. THE effects of his Humiliation: It prevailed with God in some measure to mitigate his punishment, by deferring it for some time.
- IV. THE Uses which we should make of all this.

AND first of all, *Abab's* Sin (for his we may warrantably call it, since the Prophet has charged it so peremptorily upon him) was attended with several monstrous aggravations.

1st, I N the extent of it. We do not presently see to the bottom of this Blood. But look to

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2 Kings ix. 26. and there we are taught that *Naboth's Sons* were put to death together with himself. Now I confess indeed, that by the Laws of God and man, and by a necessary consequence, children are often, in some degree, involved in the punishment of their Parents. But in capital cases, the Divine Law has excepted and separated them; *Deut. xxiv. 16. The Fathers shall not be put to death for the Children, nor the Children for the Fathers: Every man shall be put to death for his own Sin.* Why then is *Ahab's Posterity* consigned to destruction on account of this Massacre? why, by the Sentence of God, who has reserved to himself this Power to visit Parents sins, and for this plain reason, That his Punishment might be commensurate to his Sin; and his Destruction proportionable to what he had inflicted, root and branch.

2dly, THE manner of compassing *Naboth's* destruction was detestable. It was by the corruption of a whole Court of Judicature, and by Subornation of Witnesses. And so all the Magistrates of *Jezreel*, at the instigation of *Ahab's* Wife, and to serve his wicked purposes, were drawn into the horrible guilt of willful Perjury and deliberate Murder.

3dly, IT was a Sin of pernicious Example, and subversive of all Law and Justice. For what Judge would keep his hands clean from Gifts? what Witnesses would be afraid of Perjury? what Party would stick at prosecuting his Cause of Interest, Honour, Revenge, or the like, by the most violent and perverse, if probable means, when all *Israel* should hear that their King both practised and rewarded such proceedings in their Courts? And therefore with great Truth the Prophet upbraids him, that not content with his own Personal provocations of God, he made *Israel* to Sin; he hired them to it by his Bribes, he constrained them

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them by his Commands, he justified them by his Example. You see what a ground *Elijah* had for such a charge.

Arhly, It was one dismal Circumstance in this Tragedy, that it was acted under the Masque of Religion, and with high pretences to vindicate the Honour of God. It was introduced with a Fast to implore the Divine assistance and direction in the great cause they were entering upon, and the first Article in *Naboth's* Accusation was, That he had Blasphemed the great Majesty of Heaven. What a mystery of Iniquity is the Heart of man, where such black Villanies are hatched, and wrapt up, and transacted under the specious colours of Zeal and Devotion! Odious Hypocrisie in the basest of human race, but much more in a King, who punishes with death the counterfeiting his Seal, and abusing his Image and Superscription to any fraudulent purpose, as being highly dishonourable to him; and yet is not ashamed to counterfeit the great Seal of Heaven, and profane the most sacred things of God, to give Authority to his Infernal Machinations.

SUCH was *Abah's* Sin, so circumstantiated, and rendred exceeding sinful. Let us see, in the next place, how he humbled himself for it.

HIS Humiliation was extremely rigorous: The outward expressions of it could not be exceeded: and it certainly proceeded from a mighty Tempest of Confusion, Grief, and Horror in his Breast. But what was it that raised this Tempest? what part of the Prophet's discourse had proved such a Thunderbolt to him, as thus to astonish him? It was the Guilt of *Naboth's* innocent blood charged home upon him, which thus overwhelmed and sunk his Spirits; a guilt which will fill the most elevated and daring Mind with Furies and Distraction. But was he humbled in a sense of the Contempt

Contempt he had thrown upon God, the Injury he had done to man, and the havock he had made of all Laws and Justice, Sacred and Civil, by shedding blood in so vile a manner? I dare not affirm that: For if it had been so, if he had been touched with tender Sentiments of the wounds he had given to Religion and Righteousness, we had heard other things of him: Some Penitential Psalm or Prayer, deploring his Crime, and crying mightily to God for Pardon and Reconciliation: Some Edict or Proclamation issued out to suppress the Idolatries, and rectify the Corruptions which had grown to a prodigious size under his Reign. He who had thrown down God's Altars, and slain his Prophets with the Sword, would now have imployed all hands to repair those Altars, and have published his Royal Protection and Favour to the Brethren and Sons of those Prophets. But not a word of all this: No such Reformation ever entred into the thoughts of *Ahab*. And therefore his Fasting and Mourning was not the fruit of any sincere Repentance, or abhorrence of Sin, but the result of some other Consideration.

WHAT that other Consideration was, is plain from these words of the Prophet: 'Thine, and thy Wife *Jezabel's* Blood shall be poured out to the dogs in this very Vineyard which thou hast defiled with the Blood of its righteous Owner; and the flesh of thy Posterity shall be thrown about as Carrion upon the face of the Earth: And thy name shall be blotted out, like thy wicked Predecessors, *Jeroboam* and *Baasha*, whom I have utterly extirpated.' This, this is that which cut *Ahab* to the Heart; to have such a ghastly picture of his own and his Children's inevitable ruin presented to his Eyes. Had he heard nothing but a Declamation against his Sins, he could have born it as he had done before, without

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out renting his Garments or putting on Sack-cloth, or abstaining from the dainties of his Royal Table. But when it was told him, of what direful consequence his Sin would shortly prove to himself and his whole Family, he is struck dead with the frightful apprehensions of it. This is the true account and reason of *Ahab's* Humiliation.

I proceed in the III^d place to consider the effect of his Humiliation; and how it prevailed with God in some measure to mitigate his punishment.

AHAB's sorrow, as is before declared, was not of the right sort. It was only for his Sufferings, not for his Sin; or for the Consequences of his Sin, not for the Matter of it. But however, by this defective and partial Humiliation he thus far gave Glory to God, that he owned he believed his Word, and consequently acknowledged his Power, that he was higher than the highest upon Earth; his Omniscience, that he had seen through all the dark Plot which they had been carrying on; his Justice, that he would not suffer so much violence to pass unpunished; and his Vengeance, that he would retaliate the horrid Murder in all its circumstances, body for body, house for house, root for root, and branch for branch.

ALL these Attributes of God *Ahab* acknowledged and glorified, by his Humiliation. Which neither *Jeroboam* nor *Baasha* had done before him. For they hardened their Faces against the Prophets when they passed the same doom upon them, and took no farther notice of it.

AND therefore God looked upon *Ahab's* Sack-cloth and macerated Body with a compassion, which moved him to revoke something of the Punishment which he had intended for him. *I will not bring the Evil in his days, but in his Son's days will I bring*

bring it upon his House. And how this was fulfilled, the following History teaches us. *Abab*, I suppose, according to the first Sentence, should have been a Spectator of the Calamities of his own Family; which, by virtue of this mitigation, were deferred till after his death; and whereas he should have expiated Innocent blood with the shedding of his own in *Naboth's Vineyard*, he had the favour to die honourably in the Field of Battle, fighting against the *Syrians*. In other circumstances the Prophet's first denunciation was executed to a tittle. *Abab* being slain at *Ramoth-Gilead*, his Body was brought home in his Chariot; which when one washed in the Pool of Samaria, the dogs were observed, contrary to custom, to lick up the Blood. His Son *Jehoram* and his Wife *Jezabel* were slain in the Vineyard at *Jezreel*: And how the rest of his Family were cut off, we may read at large *2 Kings x.*

AND here I cannot enter upon the Uses we ought to make of the foregoing passages better, than with admiring both the Goodness and Severity of God, manifested in the History now before us.

AND first I observe God's Goodness and tender regard of our sorrow for Sin, even where it is but selfish, and terminates in a sense of our own sufferings. A Goodness so unmeasurable, that some have imagined God would rather suffer some diminution in his Attributes of Veracity, Justice, and Holiness, than not give full scope and latitude to his Mercy. But indeed all his Attributes are very consistent. For all his threatnings are conditional, and he may, with safety to his unchangeable perfections, forbear the execution of them, when the condition is fulfilled; and that according to his own rule, *Ezek. xviii. When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right,*
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he shall save his Soul alive. This is the Key to interpret all God's Threatnings, how positive and absolute soever the Terms may seem, in which they are conceiv'd. The same Veracity which has decreed the destruction of the Impenitent, has provided and made room for the escape and salvation of the returning Sinner. But multitudes, like *Abab*, fast and mourn without true Repentance; and they, like him, have their reward for it: a suspension perhaps of Judgment, or an abatement in one circumstance or other; but the substance of the punishment is inflicted.

2dly, BEHOLD the Severity of God, how that he is no respecter of Persons, but dispenses Justice equally to all Men with an impartial hand. The Prince and the Peasant are both created in his Image: To both he hath said, *Whosoever sheddeth Man's Blood, by Man shall his Blood be shed.* If the greater prey upon the less, God stands up as an avenger of all those that are oppressed with wrong; he maketh inquisition for Blood, and forgets not the cry of the Poor. Though hand joyn in hand, in Guards, and Forces, and Alliances, they shall not protect their mighty Tyrant from the Iron Hands of Divine Vengeance, which can with as much ease tear him in pieces, and give his flesh to the Fowls of the Air, and the Beasts of the Field, as he can do this to the meanest of his Vassals. Of this we have a standing Monument in the History before us.

THE rich and powerful are apt to despise the poor and helpless, to trample upon them as unworthy of a place or a name upon Earth; to tyrannize over them according to their superiority in Wealth, Strength, and Quality; to turn the very Laws against them by their Influence and Authority. But God has a right above all Courts, a prerogative above all Princes. When his Vice-

gerents fail in their Duty, and become perversers of Justice and Judgment, then he takes the Balance into his own Hand, and weighs out every Man's Portion with a rigid exactness, according to his Demerits. Then he makes fearful Examples of those who have put the Foundations of the Earth out of course, by their Barbarities and Outrages, and proclaims aloud that of the Prophet, *Jer. ix. 23. Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise Man glory in his Wisdom, neither let the mighty Man glory in his might, let not the rich Man glory in his Riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the Earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.*

CERTAINLY this is the security of the greatest part of the World, that God is the Guardian and Protector of those that are by their Age, Sex, and Condition, most obnoxious to injuries and oppressions. *The Lord is King, the Earth may be glad thereof.* If he did not sometimes exert his regal Authority, and make himself regarded and feared by the execution of his Judgments, what a Wilderness, or rather what an *Aceldama* would the World quickly become? How would the *Nimrods*, the *Ababs* encrease, and take away the Vineyards and the Lives of the meaner People, as freely as if they were the common Game of the Woods; and either allow them no Courts of Justice for redress, or else so model and frame those Courts, that they should constantly defend the outrages of their Lords and Patrons! But there is a hand from above, *which restrains the Spirits of Princes, and does wonders among the Kings of the Earth*; which conducteth the meek and desolate, and guards them in all their Distress.

THUS the Psalmist most justly observes of *Abraham*, and the rest of the Patriarchs, that when in their

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their Pilgrimages from one Nation and Kingdom to another, they had not sufficient power of their own to defend themselves against the insults of Idolaters and Barbarians, God appeared for them, and reprov'd even Kings for their sakes, as he did *Abimelech* and *Pharaoh*, saying, *Touch not mine anointed, and do my Prophets no harm.* And convinced them, upon occasion, by dreadful effects of his Power, that he was able to save to the utmost all those that put their trust in him. Well therefore might his Saints, whose Blood he had avenged, *Rev. xix.* break forth into Songs of Triumph, saying; *Alleluja; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

3dly, **LET** us be instructed from hence, not to grow hardy or audacious in any gross Sin, because we have often repeated it, or seen others repeat it with impunity. Remember the sayings of the Ancients, *Punishment is slow, but sure; and divine Vengeance hath leaden Heels but iron Hands.* I never doubted but that many a vile Offender goes out of the World without receiving the just reward of his Crimes. But so long as he has any surviving Posterity, he can never be said to be out of the reach even of temporal Punishments. For God has reserved to himself the liberty of visiting the iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children, to the third and fourth Generation. And what is done to the Child, is in effect done to the Parent. So that if deceased Parents could rise out of their Graves, they would commonly thrust themselves between their Children's Bodies, and the Swords of the Executioners. And the Prophecy that *Ahab's* Blood should be shed in *Naboth's* Vineyard, is naturally, and without any straining, verified in the History which tells us, that his Son *Jehoram* was slain there. For *Jehoram's* Blood was very properly the Blood of *Ahab*. Children being as much Parts of their Pa-

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rents, as the Branches of any Tree are parts of the Tree.

THIS should be a powerful Argument to Parents, to refrain from the commission of those Sins which may entail a Curse on all their Posterity. You may be very gallant and fearless your selves, but however pity the Child that is yet unborn, the tender Suckling, the little Innocent that knows not the difference between Good and Evil. Could you endure to deliver them with your own hands to a Thief, a Murderer, an Executioner, to have their goods spoiled, their limbs mangled, and their blood poured out? 'Tis unnatural to imagine it: But then do not commit those Sins yourselves, and treasure up the guilt for them, or allow and indulge them in such Crimes, as lead to such a fate. If you oppress others, you are raising up an Oppressor for your Son. If you supplant others in their Estate or Livelyhood, you are sapping the foundation of your own House. If you touch the life of another by direct violence, or by a false testimony, you are arming the hand of Divine Vengeance with an Ax, a Sword, or a Halter for your own Child. Possibly you may never live to see it, but look here and see what *Abab's* House suffered after his death, and do not mingle so bitter a Cup for any of your Posterity.

LASTLY, if you have committed any crying Sin, here is your Remedy pointed out to you, *Repent*. Not as *Abab* did, only in Fasting and wearing Sack-cloth, and going softly; yet let not such parts of Humiliation be neglected neither. I can never agree with our Pretenders to Purity in their humour they have taken up, to explode this very word *Penance*, as it denotes outward Severities, and even pretend Religion for their doing so. *Seest thou*, says God to the Prophet, *how Abab humbled*

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bumbleth himself? He was but a plausible Spectacle to men; his Heart was not right with God. And yet this meer garb of a Penitent had its weight with God, and found a way to his tender Compassion. Let not men presume to despise that which God approveth. He is so great a friend to Humility, that he loves the very shadow and picture of it, even where it is deficient in the Substance.

LET then our Humiliation for any grievous Sin, have its perfect work, not only in changing our Dress, our Diet, and our Aspect, but in renewing our inward parts, our Hearts and Affections: In begetting in us a detestation of our Sin, an abhorrence of ourselves for having committed it, and a firm resolution of walking for the future in the ways of Piety and Virtue. Let us beg of God not only to deliver us from the punishment of our Sin, but also from the Temptations to it, that it may never more get the victory over us. For which purpose we must watch and pray, that we enter not into dangerous Conflicts above our strength. *Ahab* was too silent a Penitent. Let us not imitate him herein; but make the cry of our Supplications drown that of our Sins. Let the assiduity of our Confessions, and the vehemency of our Suit for Pardon, leave no room in the Court of Heaven for any Accuser to be heard against us. Could we be indefatigable in the ways of destruction, and shall we not be so in the pursuit of Salvation? Here Violence is sanctified, and the Kingdom of Heaven is the prize of it. Thus wrestling, we shall prevail; thus running, we shall obtain not only a removal, but a reverse of Judgment, if not wholly for the present Life, yet at least for that which is to come. Which deliverance may God grant us all for Jesus Christ's Sake, &c.



SERMON XXXIII.

On the Eleventh Sunday after TRINITY.



2 KINGS v. 18.

In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my Master goeth into the House of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the House of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the House of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.



THESE are the words of *Naaman*, Captain of the Host of the King of *Syria*; whether it was *Benhadad* or *Hazael* who then reigned in *Damascus* is uncertain; but whoever it was, this Captain was in great esteem and favour with him, as being a Man of an extraordinary genius, and remarkably valiant, skilful, and successful in the Wars, which are the three greatest things that can be said of a Soldier: But his body was far from being answerable to the Perfections of his mind, and the same may be said of him, which the old *Romans* said

said of their Emperor Galba, *male habitat anima Galbae*, that his great Soul dwelt in a sorry tennement, for he was infected with an obdurate leprosie, a disease which is very predominant in those eastern Countries.

No doubt but he had tried every thing which his friends could recommend to him, as likely to cure him; but all to no purpose: At last a little Maid, whom the Syrians had taken captive on the borders of *Israel*, and who was preferred to wait on *Naaman's* Lady, cryed out one day to her Mistress, *Would God my Lord were with our Prophet in Samaria; he would certainly recover him of his Leprosie.* These Words being related to *Naaman*, he was so pleased with the overture, that he presently waited on the King his Master about it, and begged his leave to go to *Samaria*, and apply to the Prophet there for his cure. The King readily complied with his request, and wrote a letter to King *Jehoram*, one of the Sons of *Ahab*, then reigning in *Samaria*, to certify him that the Bearer was his Prime Minister and Favourite, and *I send him to you, says he, that you may cure him of his Leprosie, it is to take care that he might be cured by the Prophet.* But this not being so plainly exprest in the Letter, the King of *Israel* thought it was a handle which the Syrian took to pick a quarrel, and begin a War with him; for *and I a God, says he, that he sends to me to recover a Man of his Leprosie?* This threw him into loud complaints, which were quickly spread, with the occasion, all over *Samaria.*

WHEN the Prophet *Elisha* heard the news, he sent to the King, desiring that *Naaman* might be committed to his care, and he hoped to convince him that he had Power from God to heal him. This is what *Naaman* wanted; for from the Pro-

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phet it was, and not from the King, that he expected his cure. So presently he went with his horses and chariots, and stood at the door of the House of *Elisba*, not doubting but the Prophet, as soon as he knew who was there, and what he wanted, would come out to him, and pray over him, and stroke his sores with his hand, in order to heal them. But when the Prophet took no more notice of him, than only to send him a Message by his servant, that he should go and dip himself seven times in the River *Jordan*; this threw the great Man into a transport of Passion: 'What need I to have come thus far from home to wash myself in a River? Are not the Waters of *Damascus* as healing as any Waters in *Israel*? Might not I have been cleansed with them, if washing would effect the cure?' So he was going away in great indignation. But his servants, who had cooler sentiments, humbly entreated him not to depart before he had made tryal of the Prophet's prescription. 'My Father, said they, (this was a term of the greatest love and respect, and given to the greatest Princes in those Countries) 'My Father, if the Prophet had ordered you to do some great thing for the recovery of your health; if he had sent you on a tedious pilgrimage, or enjoined you to build a stately Temple, or punished you with a long abstinence from your common food, or obliged you to anoint yourself with a nauseous unguent, would you not have done it? How much more should you comply, when he only bids you wash seven times in pure water, and promises that you shall come out a sound Man?

Here *Naaman* shewed himself to be a Person of a tractable Spirit, his heat was over, and his ears open to reason. 'You say very true, says he;

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he; we are come thus far to ask the advice of an eminent Prophet; and his prescription is easy and innocent: I will try it directly.

So he went and dipped himself seven times in *Jordan*; but when he came up the seventh time, he was quite another man, perfectly regenerate and born again, his Flesh was as fair and clear as that of a young Child, and his Soul was filled with admiration of God, and convictions of his Omnipotence and Omnipresence. To the Prophet he returns with all his Retinue, and after low reverence paid to him, he frankly professes that he was now very sure, that there was no God in all the Earth, but only in *Israel*. And fain he would have rewarded the Prophet with a noble present; for he had brought with him ten Talents of Silver, six thousand peices of Gold, and ten changes of Raiment for that purpose. But *Elisha* withstood his most pressing importunity, as being resolved to maintain the honour of his Character, and that it should never be said in *Damascus*, that the great Prophet of *Samaria* was a mercenary man, and had been paid for his Cure. Indeed by this refusal, he ascribed the whole virtue of this healing to God; and owned himself to be no more than God's instrument, who had given directions by his Mouth how it should be wrought.

NAMAN cannot yet take his leave, without farther professions of his resolution to Worship the God of *Israel*, and he begs of the Prophet that he would be pleased to give him two Mules burden of Earth to carry with him to *Damascus*: and to what end? Why, to raise an Altar there for this purpose, as he plainly intimates in the next words; For, says he, thy Servant will henceforth Offer neither Burnt-Offering nor Sacrifice to any other God but the Lord. And as he had found a singular healing virtue in the waters of *Israel*, so he thought
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the Earth of that Land was better and more acceptable than all other, to build an Altar for the Service of God. But why could he not take of this Earth any where by the way, without troubling *Elisha* about it? Why, because he was desirous to have the Prophet's Blessing along with it, which he esteemed as a good Consecration of it; and I see no reason to doubt but this request was granted him: The Prophet, who had done so much for the healing of his Body, would never deny him this boon for the welfare of his Soul.

AND whereas he had obliged himself for the time to come, to worship no other God but the God of *Israel*, he begs that it might not be imputed to him as a breach of this Vow, that when he attended his Master, as his Place required, in the Temple of *Rimmon*, he should be forced to incline his Body, as often as the King who leaned upon him, should bow in his Worship: *Naaman* declares that he would not intend any Religious Worship by this motion, and desires that it may be interpreted as no more than a civil respect and obsequiousness to his Master. This was a frank and open declaration of his intentions, and the Prophet dismisses him kindly upon it, and bids him go in Peace.

THIS has occasioned a famous question upon this case, *viz.* Whether the Prophet took upon him to dispense with an idolatrous compliance in this *Syrian*. For whatever his Mind and Affections were, yet it is plain that the Action would carry an Appearance of Idolatry in it.

NOW Idolatry, in the eye of God's Law, was a Sin of the first magnitude, and prohibited upon pain of death without Mercy. And it was a most eminent part of the Prophets Office to oppose this Sin, and to denounce God's Judgments against it. The Prophets were raised up from time to time

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time almost for this very purpose. But we need go no farther than *Elijah*, the Master of this very *Elisha*, for an instance of Zeal against mingling and combining true and false Religion together. In that most numerous Assembly of Priests and People at Mount *Carmel*, related 1 *Kings* xviii. *Elijah* bid them chuse God or *Baal* for their Worship, and follow the one or the other entirely, and *not continue to halt and trim it between two Opinions*. And when the Priests of *Baal* were manifestly convicted of worshipping a false God, he caused them to be all put to death upon the Spot: So that I cannot think that his Scholar and Successor *Elisha* would say any thing that might be drawn to countenance such a mixture of Truth and Error.

It may be said indeed, that the Law against Idolatry could be executed no where but in the Kingdoms of *Israel* and *Judah*, for which it was enacted; and that the Prophet had no power to call *Naaman* to a rigorous Observance of it; but ought to be well satisfied, as he seems to have been, that this great man's Heart was wholly turned to the worship of the true God, and that his supporting his Master in the House of *Rezin* could not have an ill influence upon any worshippers there, who were already of the King's Religion; and *Naaman* did not undertake to Convert them, but only to confine his own worship to the true God.

We must confess that these circumstances, with some others which might be added to them, make *Naaman's* Case to differ very much from that of a *Jew* in the land of *Israel*, who should have appeared in any of *Baal's* Temples at the time of his Worship. For however such a one might protest the Piety of his Intentions, and that his thoughts were all the while directed to the right Object of Divine Worship, yet by his presence there

there he would actually violate the Covenant of his God, and give others reason to conclude, that he joyn'd in Communion with Idolaters. And so his example might have a bad influence. Whereas *Naaman*, when he went into the House of *Rimmon*, did nothing against the Laws of his Country, but rather complied with them. But if this declaration which he here makes, that he would worship none but the God of *Israel*, and that whenever he should enter into the Temple of *Rimmon*, it should not be upon a Religious account, but only to pay a civil respect and service to the King his Master; If this, I say, was made known to the King and Court at *Damascus*, and I cannot imagine how it could be concealed from them, when he speaks it here so openly before a large retinue of his Domesticks and Citizens; then, I say, *Naaman* dealt most ingenuously in this Affair, and I cannot see what can be charged as criminal in this his conduct.

It may be objected, that the King knowing this to be the resolution of his Servant, would not make any farther use of his Assistance in his Religious Worship. This may be very true; and yet he might still see reason to favour him, and continue him at the head of his Army. There are good grounds to think that the Eastern Princes of ancient times did not rigorously insist with their great Ministers, that they should worship the Deity after the same Religious Rites and Forms with themselves. We must not suppose that *Joseph*, while he dwelt in *Egypt*, or *Moses* while he was educated there, or *David*, while he bare Arms under *Achish* King of *Gath*, or *Daniel* while he was in the Court of *Babylon*, or *Nehemiah* under *Artaxerxes*, were at all required to comply with the King's Religion: we know they were excused. Their respective Princes saw by their Conversation, that

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that they were men fearing God; and were satisfied, by the great things which they performed, that they were endued with a Divine Spirit, and therefore they left them entirely free to communicate with the Deity in such a method of Devotion as they apprehended to be most acceptable to him. And it is highly probable, that the King of *Syria*, when he beheld the miraculous Cure which was wrought upon his Servant, and had heard the Vow which he had made upon that occasion, to worship none but the God which had healed him, readily gave him his consent to observe his Vow, without lessening him at all in the Honours and Offices which he enjoy'd under him. For among all the Idolatries of those times, they had so much true Piety as to believe, that there was a Gracious and Merciful God, who sometimes vouchsafed Miraculous Cures to men; and they esteemed the Parties so cured, to be particularly dear to him who had healed them, and accounted it impious to hinder them from making such grateful acknowledgments as they had vow'd to their supreme Benefactor.

NAAMAN, 'tis true, discovers his Apprehensions by his discourse, that he should still be obliged, as formerly, to accompany his Master to the *Pagan* Temple; which he humbly hopes God will not impute to him as a Sin, because he will take care to perform no act of Religion there. This shows the sincerity of his Conversion, and how cautious he was of doing any thing which might seem to be inconsistent with it. He feared it would look like disloyalty to the God of *Israel*, which made him uneasy at the thoughts of it. But the Prophet, who was enlightened by the Divine Spirit, saw that no hardship would be put upon him, but that the King his Master would
treat

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treat him with that tenderness and clemency which was common from Princes to their Favourites in such cases: and therefore he gives him his Blessing, and bids him go home in Peace and fear nothing.

I verily believe it was in contemplation of the kind treatment that he should find at home, and not out of condescension to any sinful Infirmary, as some have conceited, that *Elisba* dismiss *Naaman* with the blessing of Peace. It had been a contradiction to his Character, and an unworthy conclusion of the Heavenly things which were just now said and done, if the Prophet had neglected to assert any part of the Honour of God, when a case was proposed that affected it, and he had so fair an invitation to declare his judgment upon it. The answer was abundantly too short, and in truth nothing to the purpose, had not the Prophet, when he gave it, uttered it with an accent and gesture which implied that all would succeed very well; 'You shall have it in your power
' to perform your Vow honestly; trouble not
' yourself with imaginary hardships; That God
' whom you have chosen to serve, will justify
' your choice of him in facilitating your Service.
' Set your Heart at rest, and go in Peace.'

THOSE who have not seen this to be the Prophet's meaning, have drawn such conclusions from this passage, as are very prejudicial to Religion and a good Conscience. Some flatter themselves from hence, that they are allowed to bend their Religion to their worldly Circumstances, and may dissemble and temporize, and do those things which they secretly condemn, rather than lose their preferments, and bring themselves and their Families to Poverty, by adhering to truth, and acting a plain and honest part. 'For, say they, did not *Elisba*
' consent that *Naaman* should go to his Master's
' Church,

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Church, and bow to his *Syrian* Gods and Goddesses, rather than throw himself out of his great Offices, by his non-compliance? Why then may not we sacrifice an Article of Faith, or a clause of the moral Law, to the pleasure of an earthly Benefactor, on whom we depend? Why may not we make advantages in our Dealings, by striking out of the ways of Truth and Justice, and promise our selves the divine Pardon for it, as well as other Men?

THIS is a dangerous way of reasoning, and cannot be grounded upon the Text here before us, if the interpretation which I have given of it, be sound and good. But whether I or others have hit the true sense of it, this we all know, that we have no need to build our Faith or Practice, upon this or any other obscure passage of Scripture, when we have so much pure and clear light from thence to direct us in our way. We all know, that the first and most fundamental Laws of our Religion are, *that we love the Lord our God with all our Heart and Soul, and Strength, and Mind*; that we give not his glory to any Creature, but worship and serve him only as our God. We have manifold injunctions laid upon us, to put our whole trust and confidence in God, to obey him in all things, to walk in his ways with a perfect and upright Heart, and not to be moved with difficulties to turn to the right hand or the left, but to wait upon him for a happy issue out of them. We are often put in mind to have the fear of God continually before our Eyes, and not to suffer the fear of Man, or of any other Creature, to prevail against it. All these duties are recommended to us, in the most plain and indisputable terms. And therefore if we cannot fully satisfy our selves about the practice of *Naaman*, or any other great Man, we need not be concerned about

about it; we know what obedience and worship God requires of us in general, though we do not know what tryals and hardships we may be called to undergo in the practical part. When such hardships come in our way, we are allowed to exert all our Skill and Wisdom in stemming the Tyde, and getting clear of them. But at the same time we must be careful not to make Shipwreck of Faith and a good Conscience. Nothing forbids us to study to please Men, provided we do not go so far as to displease God; and we are obliged to have a regard to our temporal Interests, and wish that they may be consistent with our duty to God; but we must not expect always to find them so; for then there could be no such thing as suffering for God's sake. In short, if we sincerely love God, he will direct us in difficult cases, and shew us the way wherein we should go, and give us grace to adhere steadfastly to him, whenever a competition arises between our duty and our interest.

BUT 2dly, There are another sort of People, who run from this fault which they charge upon *Naaman*, into a quite contrary extreme, and are as fearful of coming into our Christian Churches, as if they were so many Houses of Idolatry. A separation which even *Naaman* himself would wonder at, were he to come among us, and be told, that we all profess to worship the same God, and only differ in some modes and circumstances of our Worship. But if he should hear those who style themselves Christians, call the Ministers of Christ, Priests of *Baal*, would he not be astonished to hear them thus blaspheme their own Master, and conclude that their Souls were infected with a worse Leprosie than that which his body once laboured under? A Leprosie which all the Waters of Baptism have not been able to cleanse, nor the Prayers and

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and Hands of the Prophets to drive away, though applied to it now for several Generations.

I wish they would make a spiritual application of all the circumstances of this great Man's History, and not despise the administrations of our Prayers and Sacraments, because they are all made common, plain and easie.

LET them learn of his Counsellors who persuaded him, to persuade themselves that the plainness and easiness of these ordinances should be a great inducement to them to joyn in them, and to try what benefit they can reap by them. *How can these waters of Jordan cleanse my Leprosie, said Naaman? How can the water of Baptism, and the Bread and Wine in the other Sacrament, produce those great effects for which they are instituted, say the Enemies of these Ordinances? Why, by virtue of this very Institution, because a great Prophet has blessed them, and appointed them to be the means of Salvation. Every one, says he, that is born of Water and of the Spirit, every one that eateth my Flesh and drinketh my Blood, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, and there enjoy eternal Life.*

Do we believe our Prophet, when he affirms this? Then if he had enjoyn'd us to perform much harder Services for the attainment of his promises, common prudence would have told us, it was our best way to obey him. But now, that he has made these small and easie observances the conditions of our Happiness, how much more readily should we hearken to him, how much more punctually should we attend upon them?

LET us be sensible of his infinite Goodness and Mercy to us, in making our Yoke so easie, and our burden so light; and let us not doubt but he will accomplish his own Ends by his own Means, and as surely regenerate our Souls by his easie Or-

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dinances, as *Elisba* renewed *Naaman's* Body by the Waters of *Jordan*.

FOR a greater than *Elisba* is with us; he that sanctified Water in the River *Jordan* to the mystical washing away of Sin, is with us; he that cured the Lepers, he that healed all Sickness, he that raised the dead, with the bare word of his Mouth, is with us. To him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.



SERMON



SERMON XXXIV.

On the Twelfth Sunday after TRINITY.



2 KINGS x. 31.

But Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his Heart: for he departed not from the Sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to Sin.

THIS Chapter contains the History of a great Reformation which Jehu wrought in the Kingdom of *Israel*, by utterly destroying a prevalent sort of Idolatry, that had been introduced and established by the three former Kings, *Ahab* and his two Sons, to the great offence of Almighty God, and almost to the ruin and extirpation of his true Religion.

OF *Ahab* it is said, that in high contempt of the Divine Law, which severely prohibited such idolatrous Mixtures, he took to Wife *Jezebel* the Daughter of *Etbbaal*, whom other Historians call *Ithobalus*. And with her he espoused the worship of *Baal*, the common Idol of all *Phœnicia*, and formerly of all *Palestine* too, till *Joshua* and the Judges

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of *Israel* rooted it out, as appears from the History of *Gideon* and other Passages.

THE short account of which Idol is this. The Pagan World, being gross of apprehension, and rather led by Sense than Reason, did chuse for their Gods, those things which were most beneficial to them. And the Eastern Countries esteeming the Sun to be the most beautiful and beneficial of all sensible Objects, they fancied it was a divine intelligent Being, the great Inspector and Governor of the World, making Day and Night, Summer and Winter, Seed-time and Harvest, and having a great influence upon all the Elements and every Creature; so that they invoked and prayed to it, and magnified it with the highest appellations their Language would afford, as *Baal-samen*, Lord of Heaven, *Moloch* and *Melchom* King of Heaven, and by other Titles, according to the difference of the *Phœnician*, *Persian*, *Arabian*, and other Eastern Languages. They built Temples and Altars, instituted Priests, offered Sacrifices, and performed all other religious Rites and Solemnities to the Sun, as to a God. Particularly they kept a Sacred Fire continually burning in honour of it, as being the fountain of Heat and Light; and had a peculiar way of dedicating their Children to it, by passing them either through the Flame, or between two distinct Hearths or Altars of this hallowed Fire; though sometimes they even burnt them to death in it by way of Sacrifice, as Holy Scripture assures us.

AND by another custom very frequent in these Countries, about *Carthage*, *Tyre*, and *Sidon*, they dignified their Kings, famous Heroes and Benefactors with the name of their God *Baal*, either singly by it self, or in composition with some other Word. Hence *Baal*, *Bel*, or *Belus*, (for 'tis the same) is the name of an ancient King of *Tyre*. And 'tis compounded in *Ethbaal* and *Jezebel*; and in
Hannibal,

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Hannibal, Asdrubal, Adherbal, and other *Phœnician* names, which we meet with in common History; which shews how devoted they were to this Idol. And farther, such highly-esteemed Princes and Heroes, after their death, were deified and worshipped by the appellation of *Baalim*, which is the plural number of *Baal*, and which piece of Idolatry was practised in *Israel* too, as we read often in the Sacred Histories, and in the Prophets.

THIS Impiety, purged out by the former Kings and Judges, *Ahab*, instigated by the Zeal of his Wife, studied to replant. Nor was he satisfied with the bare Toleration of it, but in order to make it the only Religion of his Kingdom, he abrogated the Law of the Lord, demolished his Altars, and killed and banished and starved his Prophets, and obliged his People, who were but too forward of their own accord, to acquiesce in and conform to this Establishment. There was but one Man who durst reprove *Ahab* to his face, with that severity which his Enormities required; and that was the great Prophet *Elijah*, who was so eminent for his favour with God, and his power to call down Blessings and Judgments from Heaven, that the King, however exasperated against him, yet durst not lay hands on him to hurt him. This Prophet made a brave attempt to ruin the credit of *Baal's* Prophets, and submitted Religion to be try'd in their own way; that since they profess'd themselves the Priests of the God of Fire, 'Let us, says he, lay Sacrifices on our respective Altars, but put no fire under them, and the God that being called upon, sends fire to consume the Sacrifice, let him be God.' The Sacrifices were prepared accordingly; and the event you well know; which though it was so astonishing, that it thoroughly convinced the Spectators that the

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truth was on *Elijah's* side, and animated them, at his command, to stone the Idolaters, according to the Law of *Moses*, even while their King and Patron stood by; yet did it not reclaim *Abab* from his fatal Error; nor was he reclaimed by the doom of utter destruction to him and his whole Family, which this Prophet afterwards denounced against him, from the Mouth of the Lord. So that it became necessary for the honour and justice of God, to execute, as he always does, his long-despised and ineffectual Threatnings. And to this purpose *Jehu*, the Captain of *Abab's* Host, being an active valiant Man, was by the special direction of God to his Prophet, anointed King over *Israel*, with this express charge from God's own Mouth, that he should utterly destroy the whole House of *Abab*, as a just vengeance for the Blood of the Prophets and other Servants of the Lord, *Naboth's* in particular, which he had cruelly shed.

THIS charge *Jehu* executed with rigour upon *Jezebel*, *Abab's* Relict, his Son *Jehoram*, and his Grand-children, insomuch that *Ahaziah* King of *Judah*, who was an Idolater, and a descendant of *Abab* by the Mother's side, was involved in the Destruction.

AND the divine Commission fully justified him, and cleared him in all this Execution. For otherwise we could not have read so deep a Tragedy, without an abhorrence of the Executioner, notwithstanding the Demerits of the Sufferers. Without this, every act of *Jehu* against the House of *Abab* had been Treason and Murder. For the general and established Law of God binds Subjects to a patient enduring of their Sovereign's Actions, be they of what nature they will. *Who shall stretch forth his hand against the Lord's Anointed, and be guiltless*, said *David* when he had *Saul* in his Power, and the greatest human reasons to dispatch him, but

but no Commission from above. If we look back to 1 Kings xvi. there we find *Zimri* in all the Circumstances of *Jehu*, except the Divine Commission. He was Captain of the Chariots to *Elah*, the wicked Son and Successor of a very bad Father, *Baasha*, against whom the Word of the Lord came by the Prophet *Jehu*, (for there was a Prophet then of that Name) *that he would cut off his Posterity; and that him that died of his House in the City, the Dogs should eat; and him that died in the Field the Fowls of the Air should eat;* just the same as *Elijah* denounced against *Ahab*. Now *Zimri* being an ambitious Man, and taking, it is likely, this Prophecy for his Warrant, assassinated his Master King *Elah*, as he sat at an Entertainment in his Steward's House. Here now was a Family like *Ahab's*, devoted to utter Excision by a known Prophecy: and *Zimri* is said to have fulfilled this Prophecy by destroying them. But it no where appears, that he had any special Commission from God, to be the Instrument of this Slaughter; and therefore his Enterprize is presently branded for Treason, and seven Days after it he died shamefully and desperately. He was one of those forward Zealots, who will not wait God's time, but take his Work out of his Hands; who though they may fulfil his Judgment, yet they sin in the doing of it, as doing it irregularly, and with the Breach of several Duties, from which his special Command alone could release them.

BUT here in the case before us, *Jehu* had a clear and full Authority for what he did. He was anointed King of *Israel* by immediate Revelation from God, and charged with the Execution of his Vengeance upon the House of *Ahab*, and commanded to go about it immediately. This quite alter'd his Condition, and together with that his Duty. He now ow'd *Jehoram* no farther Alle-

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giance as a Subject, nor Service and Gratitude as his Captain. For he was now the true and sole King of *Israel*, and *Jehoram's* Regal authority was wholly abrogated; the Sword was properly in *Jehu's* hand, and he had Power to use it against *Jehoram* and every body else, according as he should receive Orders from God, the supream Legislator of all the World.

FOR God indeed may make what Exceptions he pleases from his own general Laws. And it is as just for him to cut off Sinners by the Sword, as by a natural Death. But because the Sword cannot act, but as it is apply'd by the Hands of Men, who are accountable to God for the Use of it; therefore they must never use it contrary to his known and general Laws, except they have a special Revelation from him to direct them otherwise: Which I think is not pretended to in these latter Days by the sober and serious part of Mankind; tho' it was common in *Israel*, who, notwithstanding their Kings, lived always under a Theocracy, or immediate Direction of God by his Prophets in special Cases; who by virtue thereof made what Revolutions and extraordinary Changes of Government he saw fit: Of which, this before us was certainly of his making. For as he first directed it, so when it was accomplished, he gives *Jehu* an ample Commendation for what he had done, and promises him, that for this very Service his Family should reign to the fourth Generation.

THIS they did in fact, and might have reigned much longer, if this new Royal Family had not continued a gross Corruption in that Religion which they were raised up to reform. What that was, my Text informs us. *Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his*

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his Heart; for he departed not from the Sins of *Jeroboam*, who made *Israel* to sin.

THIS makes no small Abatement to that Praise which we were ready to give this Prince before, who had so bravely signalized his Zeal, both by Word and Deed, for the Honour of God against the Priests of *Baal*, whom he cut to pieces, and turned their Temple into a Dunghill, and rooted that Idolatry out of the Kingdom for ever. Why could not so active a Reformer have compleated his work, by correcting the Sin of *Jeroboam*, so often branded and detested? The reason why he did not do this, we shall understand presently, when we have seen what this Sin was, and the Motives and Temptations to it.

WHEN thro' the just Wrath of God for the Idolatries of King *Solomon*, the Ten Tribes of *Israel* revolted from his Son, and made *Jeroboam* their King; this new Prince consider'd, that if, according to Law and constant Custom, *Israel* should go up to *Jerusalem* to sacrifice in the Temple, the Magnificence of that holy Place, the remembrance that it was lately built by their famous King *Solomon*, and the sight they would there have of his Son and Successor, might make their Hearts relent, and bring them to re-unite again with *Judah*, to *Jeroboam's* utter Destruction; therefore he resolved at any rate to keep his People far enough from *Jerusalem*; and having advised with his Politicians, he caused two golden Calves to be cast, and put them in two Temples which he built, the one in *Bethel*, the northern Border, and the other in *Dan*, the most southern part of *Israel*; and then calling the chief of the People together, he told them (in the Language of all Schismatics) that God is in all Places, and hears and respects all Men every where alike, who serve him with a true Heart and sincere Affection:

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fection: That it was too laborious and chargeable, as well as dangerous, for them to go to perform their Devotions at *Jerusalem*, a City now at Enmity with them: That for their Ease and Safety he had provided two Temples in their opposite Coasts, that People might resort for Worship to that which was nearest to their Habitations: And that for their Priesthood, they would be no longer confined to the Tribe of *Levi*, but Men of every Tribe should be capable of it, and so the Advantage would be the more common and universal; and Religion upon as good a foot in *Israel* as it was in *Judah*.

BUT whence came *Jeroboam* to establish his Schism, with the making of two Calves? Why should he think his Temples the more sacred and inviting to the Worshippers, for the Presence of such Figures in them?

SOME learned Men will needs have these to be made in Imitation of that which *Aaron* cast for the People, out of their golden Ear-rings, in the Wilderness of *Sinai*.

BUT it is incredible that this new King and his Counsellors, however abandon'd in other respects, should avowedly imitate and copy after that Piece, which was known to have cost their Ancestors so very dear, and for which they still did Penance every Year, by a solemn Fast kept up among them. If they explain'd the Reason of their Calves, they would not sure give such a reason for them.

IT is extremely improbable that he should intend flat Idolatry by these Figures, since he well knew, and God's Prophet had assured him, when he rent his Mantle in twelve Pieces, and gave him ten, that it was for the Idolatries of *Solomon*, that ten Tribes were rent from the House of *David*, and given to him.

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HIS Intention therefore was, to continue the establish'd Religion, as to the Substance of it, and to alter such Circumstances in the Temple-Worship and Priesthood as he apprehended would be of dangerous Consequence to his Government. For his Head was now full of his new Kingdom, and how to settle it in his Family, and his Business with Religion was only to accommodate it to this End; which could affect him only in the two Particulars aforesaid.

AND because there were sundry Figures of Creatures in *Solomon's Temple*, and particularly twelve Oxen that supported a great brazen Laver: he held it both lawful and expedient to place some significant Figure in his new Temples: and he chose that of the Calves for two Ends.

ONE was, because it was a proper Emblem of a Sacrifice: So that when his Temples and Calves were dedicated together, he might say to the People, 'Now here is as much of the Divine Presence and Residence as at *Jerusalem*; and it is as lawful for *Israel* to offer Sacrifice here, as it is for *Judah* to do it there.' So those Words of his, *These be thy Gods, O Israel*, are commented upon. For no body imagines he meant to persuade them, that these Figures of the Calves were Deities; but that the Divine Majesty, upon their being consecrated to him, was as present and as ready to bless *Israel* there, as he was the Worshippers in *Solomon's Temple*. As to the Word *Gods*, being in the plural number, it is commonly so in the sacred Language, when meant of no more than the one God.

HIS other End in setting up these Figures might be, to make the Breach between the two Kingdoms irreconcilable. For though he might recommend them to his own People, yet he cared not how offensive they were to *Judah*. And here-
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in he gain'd his End; for they had their Brethren in perpetual Detestation upon this account.

AND no less odious was *Israel* to God for it. For however they pleaded their good Intentions, and Freedom from Idolatry, in what they did; yet here was a horrible Schism made in the Church of God; and together with that, many of his sacred Laws were presumptuously violated, and trampled upon. His most solemn Prohibitions to build Altars, and offer Sacrifices any where but in the Temple at *Jerusalem*; His Injunctions to all *Israel* to appear there annually at the three great Festivals, His Limitations of the Priesthood, to the House of *Aaron*, and other Sacred Ministrations to the Tribe of *Levi*, were all utterly sunk and cancelled.

NOW *Jehu* departed not from these Sins of *Jeroboam*, to wit, the golden Calves in *Bethel* and in *Dan*. We now see the Reason why he departed not from them; the very same which induced his Predecessor *Jeroboam* to set them up; lest the People going up to *Jerusalem* to worship, should think of reconciling themselves to their former Sovereigns of the House of *David*. *Jehu* could be very religious, so far as it suited with human Policy. He could let loose all his Fury upon the Worshippers of *Baal*, and the House of *Ahab*, and called out to his Friends to bear witness of his Zeal for the Lord, while he was about this Work. Why? Because he was doing his own Work at the same time, and confirming his own Royalty by the Destruction of his great Enemies and Competitors. But to think of healing the old inveterate Schism in Religion, and restore the Laws relating to the Priesthood and Temple-worship, was to run a risque which none of his Predecessors would venture upon, since the Division of the two Kingdoms. It is true, God had pro-

promised to establish that King in *Israel*, whosoever he were, that should keep his Statutes and Commandments as *David* had done; but *Jehu* had not Faith to believe him, notwithstanding the great things he had done for him: His Displeasure against *Jeroboam's* Schismatical Priests and Altars was notorious, but *Jehu* hoped to atone for that, by an over-flowing Zeal against *Baal*: Him he was resolved to exterminate, cost what it would; and that Task should be his excuse for not correcting the other Enormity.

THUS *Jehu* went but half way in his Reformation, and his Religion was but human Policy in the bottom: He was more careful of his own Interests than God's Honour, and his great Zeal ended in Self-love.

How much better a Reformer was *Hezekiah* in his Kingdom of *Judab*, who not only abolished Idolatry, but Schism too, by suppressing those High-places we read of, which the People had set up as so many private Altars, to offer part at least of their Sacrifices in, and that in prejudice to the Priests, and in derogation to the Temple and Altar at *Jerusalem*. And this he did at a time when he had dangerous Enemies of the *Assyrians* and *Philistines*, and when it might be thought very unseasonable and unpolitick to give any disgust to his own People: But this Prince was no Secular Politician, but indeed a much wiser man; for he trusted God farther than any of his Predecessors, since the division of the two Kingdoms. And the wisdom of this trust was fully justified, by those continued Successes and miraculous Deliverances which God vouchsafed him. And therefore from the whole we may conclude, that it is our truest Policy and Interest to be thorough and impartial Servants of God; to obey him in his own sense and way, without reserve; and not to be tempt-

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ed by any by-respects and present considerations to deal deceitfully with him; but pursue our Duty steddily through all difficulties and apparent hazards, till we come to the issue of it, which cannot fail to be happy. For however we may flatter ourselves that we are no Idolaters, because we do not allow of Image-worship, but are rather zealous against it; yet if we sacrifice any Command of God to any Imagination, any secular Interest or Honour, any love or fear of Men, they are our Idols and our Gods, as effectually as if we had so many Images before us.

How many *Jehus* have we known and heard of among ourselves, violent for some things in Religion which have promoted their Affairs, and meer Libertines in all the rest? who while they have abhorred Idols, have run with a flaming Zeal to the commission of Sacrilege, and have made no scruple, or rather have pleaded Conscience for perverting the plain genuine Sense of as many passages of God's word, as have been urged against them, and opposed at any time to their evil ways.

WHAT reward can such men hope for, who use Religion for such a cloak of Hypocrisie, and while with *Jehu* they make Ostentation of Zeal for God, sit down with him in the known and avowed breach of his most sacred Laws? They may possibly be as successful as he was, in gaining some temporal Advantages by such a Conduct; but from his Example they have no Encouragement to hope for God's Blessing along with them. On the contrary, they will find that his most meritorious Service, which he is applauded for in this chapter, is afterwards put to the Account of his Sins, and threatned with the Divine Vengeance. *I will*, says God by the Prophet *Hosea*, chap. i. ver. 4. *I will avenge the Blood of Jezreel upon the House of Jehu.* Which at first hearing must sound strangely:

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strangely: For will God punish him for the execution of his own decree, which was so expressly put into his hands to accomplish? Where is the Justice of this? I answer, it is very just: for *Jehu* by his subsequent Actions plainly shewed, that in all this execution he studied rather to please himself, than to serve and glorifie God: and therefore it was very fit that he should bear the load of that Guilt, which nothing but an expresse Revelation could discharge him of, as I noted before, since he had so very little regard to the Will of God in this extraordinary Dispensation. This shows how the leaven of Self-love and partial Obedience will corrupt the whole lump of otherwise great and good Services.

LET us then, in conclusion, be perswaded that it is our truest interest to serve God in his own way, with a perfect and upright Heart; not keeping one Commandment and breaking another, just as it suits with our present Affections or Conditions, but rendring a due and impartial Obedience to all the Divine Laws; so shall we not be sent away with the transitory Rewards of *Jehu*, and of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, a blaze of secular Glory, Riches and Honours; but being found faithful to the whole Will of our Lord, shall be admitted into that everlasting Joy which he hath prepared for us, through his Merits, who there liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost &c.



SERMON



SERMON XXXV.

On the Thirteenth Sunday after TRINITY.



2 KINGS xix. 37.

And it came to pass as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his God, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his Sons smote him with the Sword: And they escaped into the Land of Armenia; and Esarhaddon his Son reigned in his stead.



UCH was the Tragical end of a King who had prospered to his own ruin; so intoxicated with the success of his own and his Progenitors Arms, as to fancy that all the powers of Heaven and Earth were chained to his Chariot wheels. History abounds with the great Actions of the *Assyrian* Emperors. *Hezekiah*, in his Prayer to God upon this occasion, confesses that they had rendred themselves formidable, by destroying the Nations and their Lands:

To trace them up to their fountain head, they were descended from *Assur* the Son of *Shem*, who
went

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went out from his Brethren, and built Nineveh, as we read *Gen. x. 11.* and from him was denominated *Assyria*, that great Country in the *East*, bounded with *Armenia*, *Media*, *Mesopotamia*, and *Babylon*; at this day called *Yerach*, and almost wholly under the Dominion of the *Turks*, which they so name from *Ereck*, one of the primitive Cities of that Country, mentioned *Gen. x. 10.*

THE City of *Nineveh*, situate on the West-side of the River *Tigris*, was the flourishing Seat of the *Assyrian* Emperors, for above thirteen Centuries, till the time of *Sardanapalus*, who proved such an effeminate Prince, that his Captains conspired against him, and the two principal Leaders in the Conspiracy, *Belesis* and *Arbaces*, divided his Dominions between them. *Belesis* had *Babylon*, *Ghaldea* and *Arabia*: And *Arbaces* had *Nineveh*, *Media*, and all the rest of the divided Empire.

THIS *Arbaces* is in Sacred Writ called *Tiglath Pileser*, or *Thilgath Pilneser*, of whom we read *2 Kings xvi.* that he assisted King *Abaz* the Father of *Hezekiah* against *Rezin* King of *Syria*, and *Pekah* King of *Israel*, and that to divert *Rezin*, he laid Siege to his Metropolis *Damascus*, took it, slew the King, and carried the people Captive.

IN the next Chapter we read, how *Salmanaser*, the Son and Successor of this *Tiglath Pileser*, came up against *Samaria*, the head City of the Kingdom of *Israel*, and took it, and carried away the ten Tribes of *Israel* Captive, and dispersed them in several Cities of the *Assyrians* and *Medes*.

WHILE *Salmanaser* was engaged in the Siege of *Samaria*, *Hezekiah*, who was now upon the Throne of *Judah*, took the Opportunity to recover what had been lost from his Kingdom in the reign of his Father *Abaz*. And when the *Assyrian* sent to him to demand the Tribute which *Abaz* had agreed to pay annually to *Tiglath Pileser*

as his Patron and Defender, *Hezekiah*, not thinking himself bound to stand to such Agreement, refused to pay it any longer. The Sacred History says, *He rebelled against the King of Assyria, and served him not.* Though the word *rebellion* be now generally taken in an ill sense, for a seditious insurrection and fighting against lawful Governors, yet our Translators did not design it should be so taken in this place, but only to denote that this good King would no longer acknowledge himself to be a tributary and dependent of the King of *Assyria*, which is all the Rebellion that is here meant, as is sufficiently explained.

THE reason why he disown'd his dependence upon the *Assyrian* was, *because he trusted in the Lord his God.* He had reformed those abuses and corruptions in Religion which prevailed in his Father's reign, and which, by the just Judgment of God, had subjected him to a Foreign Yoke. He removed the High places, cut down the Groves, brake in pieces idolatrous Images, and particularly that of the Brazen Serpent, because the People treated it with a religious regard, by offering Incense to it. In all things he conformed to the *Mosaick* Law, and kept all God's Commandments as therein delivered. And consequently he had the best ground in the World to depend upon God for his Protector, who had made many express and gracious Promises to his People *Israel*, that when they kept his Statutes and his Judgments which he commanded them, he would deliver them from all their Enemies round about. The truth of these Promises they had often experienced, and seen their Folly in trusting men rather than God.

At present *Hezekiah* was safe from the resentments of *Salmanaſer*, whose Arms were providentially restrained from *Judah*, by a War which broke

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broke out at this time between the *Affyrians* and the King of *Tyre*. But when *Salmanaser* was dead, and his Son *Sennacherib* succeeded him, he renewed the demand upon *Hezekiah*, for the Tribute which *Abaz* had paid to his Grand-Father *Tiglath Pileser*; and upon *Hezekiah*'s refusing to pay it, he denounced War against him, and marched with a great Army into *Judea* to fall upon him.

Now when *Hezekiah* saw that *Sennacherib* had brought a great Army into his Coasts, and begun to take his fenced Cities, he advised with his Council what was best to be done, in case the *Affyrians* should advance so far as to lay Siege to *Jerusalem*.

AND first they resolved to stop up the Fountains and Brooks that were in the Fields, that they might distress them with want of Water. In the next place they repaired the City-walls where they were broken, and erected a new outer wall for greater safe-guard. The King also provided Darts and Shields in abundance, and appointed Captains over the People to exercise them, and gathered them together before him in the street of the gate of the City, and spake comfortably to them, saying, *Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an Arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our Battels. And the People rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah.* 2 Chron. xxxii.

SENNACHERIB being informed how the Citizens of *Jerusalem* were preparing to receive him, and considering what a hard task it would be to take such a strong and populous City, grew inclinable to hearken to terms of Accommodation, and quickly received such Proposals from *Hezekiah* as were satisfactory to him. Which

were to pay him at present three hundred Talents of Silver, and thirty Talents of Gold, amounting in all to near three hundred and fifty thousand Pounds of our money, and to make punctual payment of the Tribute demanded for the future. This composition, I suppose, *Hezekiah* did not make of his own will, but at the instance of his People. For to raise the Sum presently to be paid, he was forced to cut off a great deal of Gold from the Doors and Pillars of the Temple; which was indeed better than to suffer it to fall into the Enemies hands; though I believe, if he had been left to himself, and not over-perswaded by his Counsellors, he would have trusted God for his Deliverance, without taking this extraordinary method for it. And I doubt not but when the War was ended, he restored what he had thus borrowed to purchase his Peace, though he was cheated in his Bargain.

FOR *Sennacherib* having received the money he demanded, made an expedition into *Egypt*, mentioned by *Herodotus* and others, as well as our Sacred Writer: where being baffled at the Siege of *Pelusium*, the entrance into *Egypt*, and otherwise weakened; (*Herodotus* says, that the Bow-strings and Quivers of his Archers and Shields of his Soldiers were all gnaw'd to pieces in one night, by a miraculous Army of Rats and Mice:) returning into *Palestine*, he renewed his quarrel with *Hezekiah*, upon pretence that he was a Confederate with the King of *Egypt*.

To upbraid him with this, and to defie him in the face of his own People, he sent three of his chief Officers to *Jerusalem*, to make an Oration to the People against their King, which was pronounced by *Rabshakeb*, because he understood the *Hebrew* tongue; for which reason some of the *Jewish Rabbies* have fancied that he was a Renegado

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gado Jew, that had fled from his Country, and embraced both the Religion and Service of the *Assyrians*. But if the Speech which he spoke on this Occasion, was of his own composing, he betrays much ignorance in the Jewish Religion, when he charges *Hezekiah* with Impiety, for destroying the High Places, and Altars erected in them, and obliging all the *Jews* to come and offer their Sacrifices at *Jerusalem*. For this act of his was strictly agreeable to the divine Law, and a height of zeal for the worship of God, to which few Kings besides himself arrived. It being observed in the lives of otherwise good Kings, as an Alloy of their religious Character, that the High Places were not taken away in their Reigns.

THESE High Places were the eminencies of Hills shaded with Groves of Trees, and furnished with Altars and other conveniences for religious Worship. They had commonly a fence about them, to keep out Cattle and wild Beasts from defiling them, but no other Covering at top, besides what the heads of the Trees made. Such shades were pleasant in those hot Countries, and generally a sufficient covering where it seldom rained, and by their retirement conduced much to the Solemnity of Religion. There was one reason for these High Places, and several against them. The reason for them was, that they were like Chappels of Ease to the Mother Church, where the people could offer their Sacrifices and other Devotions, without taking a long journey to *Jerusalem*. The reasons against them were, that they were erected by the Heathen, and that the *Israelites* who frequented them, were in danger of falling into Idolatry, or at least into Schism, and that they detained Men from going up at the appointed times to *Jerusalem*, as God had expressly commanded them. And therefore it was a great slander in *Rabshakeh*

to say, as he does in effect, that *Hezekiah* had sinned against God, by destroying the Altars of the High Places, and obliging Men to come and offer their Sacrifices at *Jerusalem*; since in all this he was strictly conformable to the divine Command.

ANOTHER great fault of this Speaker was, his pretending a Commission given him by Revelation from God, to go and besiege *Jerusalem*. *Am I come up*, says he, *without the Lord against this place? the Lord said unto me, go up against this Land and destroy it.* The Lord might say thus to the *Assyrian* that went up and destroyed *Samaria*, as he did afterwards to the *Babylonian*, when he sent him against this very Place; but he could not say so to *Sennacherib* upon the occasion of this Expedition, because he says the very contrary by *Isaiah*, *That he should not shoot an arrow against it*; and the event proved this to be a true Prophecy; but the Oracles of God cannot contradict one another; Therefore that which *Rabshakeh* pretends here, is a mere Fiction.

3dly, *RABSHAKEH*'s Instructions afterwards clash, and are inconsistent with what he says here. For what need was there to plead the authority of the God of *Israel* for this Undertaking, when afterwards he challenges even this God to defeat him, making no more account of him, than of the Gods of the Gentiles. *Where are they*, says he, *that should have defended the Countries which my Master has conquered? and who is your Lord, that he should deliver your Jerusalem out of my hands?* His Master's Letter which he sent to *Hezekiah*, is full of the same Blasphemy. *Let not thy God*, says he, *in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the King of Assyria.* And then he recounts his triumphs over the Gods of the Heathen, as his Servant had done; as if all Gods were alike, and *Sennacherib* were above them all.

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THIS quickly came to the tryal. But first God sends this infatuated Man a Message, to let him know both what he had done by him, and what he would do with him. *I have, says he, so ordained and brought it to pass, that thou shouldst be a scourge in my hand, to lay fenced Cities into ruinous heaps. And this my pleasure was the cause of all thy Victories, and the only reason why the inhabitants of the conquered places were not able to resist thee, but were dismayed and confounded, and became as the grass of the Field, and as the green Herb; or even as vile and useless as grass upon the house-tops, and as Corn blasted before it is grown up. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.*

ALL this was executed upon Sennacherib before he was able to perform any action against Jerusalem. In that night, says the Text, *the Angel of the Lord smote the Camp of the Assyrians.* The same Night, say some, that Hezekiah received Sennacherib's blasphemous Letter: The Talmudists say, it was the same Night that the Army of the Assyrians lay down before Jerusalem, but were so weary that they could for the present attempt nothing against it. This is very probable, and both these Interpreters may well be understood of one and the same time.

THE Angel of the Lord smote them, with a pestilential Disease, says Josephus; with Lightning, say the Talmudists; with a hot Wind, say others, which is very frequent in those Parts, and often destroys Multitudes in a Moment. Any of these ways suit well with God's Threatning, that he would send a blast upon them, and make them as withered Grass or blasted Corn. But who among them was left to tell how they felt the Destruction?

There is no need of knowing it, or guessing at it. I doubt not but it was purely miraculous, that God might the more illustrate his Power, by the unaccountableness of this slaughter.

SENNACHERIB, I take it for granted, was not present in the Army which was thus destroyed. It was headed by *Rabshakeb* and the other two Officers. And their Master was upon the Road from *Libnah* with Forces, in order to joyn them. But when he heard of the Hand of God upon his Army at *Jerusalem*, he turned in Amazement, and made the best of his way home to *Nineveh*. This agrees well with the Texts which say, *He shall not come before this City, but shall hear a rumour, and shall return into his own Land, and I will cause him to fall by the Sword in his own Land.*

GOD had reserved him for a more remarkable and bloody Death. The loss of his Army weakened him so, that he fell into contempt among his Subjects. Several of his Provinces revolted from him, particularly *Media*, which was the largest and most considerable of them all. For the *Medes*, when they heard in how low a Condition he was returned to *Nineveh*, immediately shook off his Yoke, and formed themselves into a kind of popular Government or Commonwealth. But soon growing sick of the confusions which this caused among them, they were forced to have recourse to Monarchy for the Remedy, and the next Year they chose *Deioces* for their King, whom they had formerly made great use of, as a happy arbitrator of their differences; and for the great proof which he had given of his justice and abilities on such Occasions, they advanced him to this Dignity.

SENNACHERIB was not only grown contemptible to his Subjects, but odious and intolerable to his own Family; for, like a disappointed Tyrant, he vented his savage Humours upon all that
came

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came in his way. This his ferocity was probably the motive which bred in two of his Sons such a Rancour against him, that they conspired his Death; which they executed at a time and place when they might be least suspected of him, and in least danger from his Guards; falling upon him with their Swords in his own Chapel, as he was at his Devotions. The unnatural Assassines made their escape into *Armenia*, which is all that we know of them, but may justly suppose that they received the reward of their Parricide. His Son *Esfarbaddon*, who succeeded him, reigned with great Felicity thirty nine Years, and added *Babylon* and its territory to his Dominions.

SOME Interpreters there are, who think the reason why *Sennacherib's* Sons flew him, was, because in his distress he had vowed to offer them up in Sacrifice to his God. And though there appear not any ancient History to assure us of this, yet we must confess it is a very plausible Conjecture. For it is the well-known persuasion of many People; that when they were in imminent danger, the last remedy they had to extricate themselves, was to vow, and sometimes presently to offer up the dearest thing that they had in Sacrifice to their Gods. I shall mention but one Example, which is in the third Chapter of this second Book of Kings; where we are told, that when the three Kings, of *Judah*, *Israel*, and *Edom* besieged the King, of *Moab* with, their united Forces in his capital City, and he saw they were too hard for him, he took his eldest Son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him up for a Burnt-Offering upon the Wall; which affected the Besiegers with so much horror, that they raised the Siege and left him.

Now to draw to a Conclusion; The Moral of all this History is pointed out to us, by that most ancient Greek Historian *Herodotus*, who had travelled

travelled in *Egypt*, and had carefully observed the Curiosities of it. He tells us, that in one of their Temples, he was shown the Figure of their King *Sethon*, who reigned over the *Egyptians* when this very *Sennacherib* invaded them, and was disappointed by a prodigious Multitude of Rats and Mice, which spoiled his Arms, as is noted before. In memory of this Prodigy, and miraculous Deliverance, King *Sethon's* Statue holds a Mouse in his Hand, with this Inscription, *Let every one that looks on me, learn to fear God.* We may well take the hint, and say, Let every proud, insolent, blaspheming Wretch, who has used his Mouth to pour out horrid Blasphemies against Heaven, look upon *Sennacherib*, and learn to humble himself with the lowest Penitence and Meekness, before that Omnipotent Power, who is thus able to abase the loftiest of the Sons of Men, who shall presume to exalt and magnify themselves against him. God has declared in a very emphatical Manner, that of all sorts of Sinners he beholds the Proud, with a peculiar Indignation and Aversion. And such proud Men are all those who profanely curse and swear, and treat the Deity and sacred Things with irreverent Language. Such proud Men are they, who being often reprov'd, harden their Hearts, hear the Divine Threatnings without receiving due Impressions from them, reject the Laws of God to follow their own Lusts, and do that which is good in their own Eyes. Such proud Men are they, who being considerable in this World, demean themselves as if they were above the Worship of God, and endeavour to persuade or terrifie others, by the Influence which they have over them, to depart from some Duty of Piety or Virtue, out of respect to them: and so to serve and please them rather than God. Methinks I hear them vaunting in *Sennacherib's* Language,

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guage, how dearly they will make those repent of it, who refuse to pay them this Homage. Such proud Men are those, whether Civil or Military, who depend upon their Arms, their Numbers, their Wealth, their Skill, or any kind of Creature, more than upon their Creator: and are not careful to see that their Undertakings be pleasing to God, and to engage his Assistance and Blessing in the first Place. *Let such look upon Sennacherib, and learn to fear God.* For they are in the same way of destruction with him, and though it may not overtake them in this World, it is reserved for them in the next: for God beholdeth the proud afar off; he will never suffer them to dwell in his Presence.

LASTLY, Let haughty and insolent Men take notice, that as they treat God and Man, so they shall generally be treated by their own Families. This outrageous Blasphemer was horribly outraged by his own Children. And I believe, if I should lay it down as a general Rule, that those who neither fear God, nor regard Man, are not heartily loved nor regarded, even by their nearest Relatives, I do not think there would be found many Exceptions to it. So far as my own Observation reaches, I have seen, that Children have no Reverence nor true Value for those Parents, who are of a proud, atheistical Spirit, but serve them as they serve God, *i. e.* care not for any Communion with them: and are glad of their absence, even out of the World, that they may enjoy themselves the better. Indeed it is very necessary it should be so; it is a great Argument that there is a God, that the World is governed by his Providence, that he is continually making good his own sacred Rule, *Those that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly regarded.*

THUS

THUS the atheistical *Sennacherib* teaches us Piety and Humility, by his dreadful Example. Let us prove such happy Scholars, as to go and act as contrary to him as we possibly can. Let us see the God that judgeth in the Earth, and fear, and do no more so wickedly. Let not the Voice of Blasphemy be heard amongst us: but let us remember, that a Pagan King hath decreed and enacted a Law to be observed throughout his Dominions, *Dan. vi. 26. that Men tremble and fear before the God of Israel, for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever: his Kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his Dominion shall be even unto the End. To him be ascribed all Honour, &c.*



SERMON



SERMON XXXVI.

On the Fourteenth Sunday after TRINITY.



J E R. v. i.

Run ye to and fro through the Streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad Places thereof, if ye can find a Man, if there be any that executeth Judgment, that seeketh the Truth, and I will pardon it.



THESE are the Words of God by the Prophet *Jeremiah*, who prophesied in *Jerusalem* in the days of *Josiah*, *Jehoiakim*, and *Zedekiah*, and testified to the sinful People, that they were ripe for Destruction and Captivity, which came to pass in his own time, and so he lived to see the Accomplishment of his own Predictions. And these Words of my Text shew how just it was with God to pour out his threatened Judgments upon this Generation. For here he challenges the whole City to produce one Man, in any publick Station or Dealings, who was a real Lover of Right, and made

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made Conscience of keeping the Commandments of God; and promises, that if they could find but one such Man, high or low, in the great Houses, or in the Shops and Markets, he would spare them, and avert the Judgments which were impending over them for that one Man's sake.

THIS was a greater Favour than that which *Abraham* requested for *Sodom*, which might have been saved, if it could have produced ten righteous Persons. And therefore it intimates to us the abandoned, reprobate State of *Jerusalem*, at this time, when they were so universally immersed in all Sorts of Impiety and Immorality. We will observe their Sins in the Order wherein the Prophet has set them down, in this very Chapter now before us.

AND the first Breach of Truth which he charges upon them, was a monstrous gross one, no less than deliberate and wilful Perjury. *Though*, says he, *they say, The Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely.* Now this was horrible indeed, that they had so familiarized Oaths, the most solemn Acts of Religion, as not to regard whether the Matter which they swore to were true or false. And it was a farther Aggravation of their Sin, That though they knew they were under the Inspection of the Divine Majesty, from whom they could conceal no secret thing; and though they smarted under the Strokes of his Vengeance, and were consumed for their Impiety, yet they still persisted in it, and refused to receive Correction; till at last their King *Zedekiah* breaking his Oath of fealty to the King of *Babylon*, completed the Ruin of himself and his People.

2dly, THEIR next Breach of Truth was Idolatry. *They forsook God the Fountain of living Waters, and bowed out to themselves Cisterns, broken Cisterns which could hold no Water.* It was a strange thing to see how

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how madly this People ran after the lying Vanities of the *Gentiles*, after they had received such manifold and undeniable Proofs of the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of a living God, who was present with them; after so many Laws enacted against Idolatry, so many signal Judgments inflicted on them for falling into this Sin, such a Hedge and Fence set about them to keep them from mingling with other Nations, lest they should learn their Ways; and yet there was scarce any Abomination of this kind with which they were not polluted, and the Land of *Israel* was a common Receptacle for the absurd Religions of all the Heathens round about. These nauseous Corruptions were very much owing to the prophane Marriages of their Kings. The Wisdom of *Solomon* was not proof against such bosom Seducers; and *Ahab's Jezabel* made him a thorough *Sidonian* Idolater, and filled his Kingdom with *Baal's* Priests. Such Matches constantly proved the Subversion of the true Religion, insomuch that after the first leprosy of Idolatry introduced by *Solomon*, there was not one good King in *Israel*, and very few in *Judah*. The Book of God's Law, which contained the Oracles of true Religion, was commonly lost and buried in rubbish, his Altars were thrown down, and his Priests slain with the Sword.

Now when God was thus affronted by his own People, whom he had chosen out of all Nations of the Earth for this very Purpose, that they might serve him in Opposition to all other Gods; when they chose those other Gods and rejected him, it was then high time to execute upon them that Curse which he had denounced to this very Sin, *that when they defiled their own Land with Idols, they should serve Wood and Stone in a Land which was not theirs.*

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3dly, **THEY** farther violated the purity of God's righteous Laws by their Adulteries and Fornications. *They assembled by troops in the Harlots Houses: they were as fed Horses; every one neighed after his Neighbour's Wife.* This Lewdness was sometimes a concomitant of their Idolatries; for many rites of *Pagan Religion* were celebrated with Drunkenness, Uncleaness, and all sorts of Debauchery. But even when there were no Idolatries practised in *Israel*, the *Jews* were much addicted to this Vice. Our Saviour calls the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* an *adulterous Generation*; and *Josephus*, in his History of them, assures us, that this character was literally true.

Now this was a Crime of a high Nature, a complication of Sins, and productive of so many sad consequences, that death was the just punishment allotted to it. But who shall pronounce Sentence, where all are Guilty? when every one hath thus corrupted his way, it then becomes necessary for God the Supreme Judge to remove such a provoking People out of his sight.

4thly, **ANOTHER** breach of Truth was their shameful prevaricating with God's Word, and torturing it to make it speak contrary to its genuine sense and meaning. To this end they encouraged false Prophets, who would prophecy smooth things, put away the evil day far from them, speak Peace to them in the name of the Lord, though he did not send them, carefully avoid falling into such discourses as were apt to convince them of Sin, and awaken their Conscience.

THEY would either keep clear of displeasing Texts, or handle them with so much art and subtle distinctions, as to make them pliant enough to the manners of their Hearers. In many cases they would harden themselves against the plainest threatnings of God's Word, and say in their worst circumstances,

circumstances, *Evil shall not come, neither shall we see Sword nor Famine.* They would not see with their Eyes nor hear with their Ears, the things which were most obvious to those Senses: This we know, by our own woful experience, is possible to be done. Wicked men can confess a God, and own his Word, and yet not be moved by it to turn from their evil ways. This is a desperate condition, and calls for Judgments to destroy, rather than for a Rod to correct.

5thly, THEY were very unthankful to God, and insensible of his Blessings conferred upon them. Though he gave them the former and the latter rain in season, and caused the ground to yield them a plentiful Harvest, yet were they not induced hereby to look up to him, and glorifie him for his Mercies, and fear to sin against him; but on the contrary, they offered the Portion which was due to his Temple and Altar, in Sacrifice to Idols; they consumed their abundance upon their Lusts, to the multiplying of their Sins and Transgressions: They grew more proud, insolent, and cruel to their Inferiors, more covetous and apt to withhold that which was due to others, oppressing the Hireling in his wages, and suffering their Poor to perish for want of that relief which God had commanded them to bestow upon them. Now this very thing is noted as one reason why they were carried into Captivity, *that the Lands which they had over-tilled; might enjoy their Sabbath.* A spirit of Covetousness had led them to till their Land in the Sabbatical years, when by their Law they should have lain fallow, and their poor People should have reaped that which the ground brought forth of its own accord in those years of rest. But so unthankful were they to God, and so unmerciful to their poor Brethren, that they neglected this Law for seventy years; and for so

many years they were doomed to the *Babylonian Captivity*.

6^{thly}, THEY were very fraudulent in their dealings one with another, both in word and deed. It was a common thing for wicked men to circumvent and ensnare the righteous, and by false accusations to bring them into Courts of Judicature. And it was easie for them to obtain a Sentence against them, and wholly to ruin them, or extort from them a high composition, because their Judges were very apt to take Bribes, and to have respect of mens Persons in Judgment, as this and other Prophets plainly inform us. In their buying and selling, false weights and measures were used without scruple. In making up of their Manufactures, an universal Fraud and Coufenance prevailed, that the Maker and Seller might get more at present, and that their Customers being served with slight goods, might be obliged to buy again the sooner. The Prophet *Isaiab* accuses them for adulterating their Coin and their Liquors; *Thy Silver*, says he, *is become dross, thy wine mixed with water*. And this Prophet here upbraids them, that their Houses, filled with ill-gotten goods, were become as nests of rapacious Birds; *therefore*, says he, *are they become great and waxen rich: they are waxen fat and shine*; they made a splendid and gallant figure in those Ornaments which they had got by dishonesty, without any concern or shame, that they had obtained them by such unjust means.

WHAT can be the end of a People whose Laws are so overborn by the false Witness, the corrupt and partial Judge, the powerful Oppressor? Who are so continually abusing the good ends of Commerce and Traffick, and subverting one another in the making, buying and selling of their Manufactures, their Food and Raiment, and every thing that is vendible? A Nation of such
People

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People must needs, by the tendency of such Politicks, devour one another, and be fit for nothing but Slaves and Captives. Both Spoiler and Spoiled must come to nothing.

Lastly, THAT which portended the Extirpation of these *Jews* most certainly was, that not only all the forecited Iniquities were notorious in practice, but were moreover approved of as it were, and settled among them by common consent. *The Prophets,* says he, *prophecie falsely, and the Priests bear rule by their means, and my People love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?* A numerous tribe of hungry Prophets, who had no Mission nor Revelation from God, were not so much concerned for the Truth, as for their own Interest, by which they were prompted to swim with the Tide; and studied to speak such things as were pleasing to their Masters, being ever ready, as another Prophet says, *Ezek. xiii. 19. to slay the Righteous and spare the Wicked, for handfuls of Barley and morsels of Bread; i. e. to oppose or favour men, not according to their real merits, but just as the Prophets Masters and their own Interest directed.* This sinful compliance of theirs was acceptable to the Priests, whose manners were generally such as exposed them to the severe reproofs of the true Prophets of God, as their Writings testify: and therefore they were well pleased when such reprovers were run down by an opposite faction of Prophets, who pretended to be inspired, and sent to contradict them in the Name of the Lord. And the People, in the third place, were likewise well satisfied both with Prophets and Priests, because their Morals were such as would not bear the true Prophets censure, according as they are already set forth.

Now what can be the issue of such a state of things? What Antidote is there left to expel na-

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tional corruptions, when those who should remove them, are their strenuous Advocates and Patrons, and the governing part in all Orders of men consent that they should prevail and flourish as they do?

IN such a state of things as this, where-ever it obtains, we may imagine the supreme Governor of the World to say to the Members of it in the words of my Text, *Run through the streets of your City, seek and enquire in the high Places thereof, if ye can find a Man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it.* But he will not pardon those Communities which are immerst in as many deadly Sins as corrupt *Jerusalem*. In this case St. Paul's argument is grounded upon the strongest reason, *if God spared not the natural branches,* expect him not to be more indulgent to those who are but ingrafted in their room.

LET the People of any Nation, City, or Society, try themselves, and prognosticate their own doom by that of *Jerusalem*: that once holy and happy City, where God declared that he delighted to dwell; where he erected the only Temple and Altar which he had in the World: Where he manifested his special Presence by mighty Signs and Wonders, and miraculous Protections of the place from a world of Adversaries round about: Where the Tables were repositied of that Sacred Law, which he proclaimed from Heaven with his own mouth, and wrote with his own hand: And where the Bodies of many of his dearest Saints were committed to the grave. Even this City, precious in the sight of God upon so many Accounts, is given up by him into the hands of the *Gentiles*, who have consumed the most sacred things of it with fire, defaced its beauty, demolished its walls and splendid Palaces, the work of the most ingenious

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nious Architects of Old, slain Myriads with Swords, Famine, and Pestilence, and carried the Remainder into a slavish and irksome Captivity. If any man ask, why God hath so abhorred and forsaken the Habitation of his Holiness, he gives us the reasons of it in this same Chapter. Perjury, Idolatry, Uncleaness, and all the rest of the deadly Sins, were grown predominant in it. Insomuch that *Isaiah* styles it *Sodom*, and the Citizens of it the People of *Gomorrhah*. This is enough to prove that it was fit for nothing but the fire, and it hath received that just recompence of Reward. And the history of it is recorded for the Instruction of all other Cities who have the Sacred Scriptures to instruct them. They may hear *Jerusalem* warning them, saying, 'Look upon me and learn to fear God. Will ye steal, and murder, and commit Adultery, and swear falsely, and sacrifice to the Idols of your own imagination, and hope to escape the wrath of God better than I have done? Will ye not be instructed by my example, and execute judgment, while the long-suffering of God endures, that he may turn from his Wrath and be gracious unto you? He sent me to *Shiloh*, *Jer. vii. 12.* where he had placed his Name and Worship at the first, that I might see how he had made that place a desolation, for the wickedness of them that dwelt therein. But I had not the grace to profit by this admonition. For which neglect I am now myself become an instance of the divine Vengeance for Sin. Let my Calamities conduce to your Salvation, and put away those Sins from among you, which have laid me in ruinous heaps, and turned me into a Monument of the divine Fury. *Look upon me, and learn to fear God.*

SUCH a lesson of Repentance we may naturally suppose this degenerate City to preach to us.

We may justly conclude that the like provocations will bring down the like judgments upon any other place. For the nature of Sin is not changed; it is now as odious to God, as it ever was in any former Age of the World. And where-ever it prevails against the voice of God's Word, and the Laws of Virtue, it is the fruitful Parent of innumerable Calamities to such a place. And all those who abandon themselves to the service of it, are the Enemies of the publick Prosperity and Welfare; and contribute, as far as in them lies, to turn this World into such a place as Hell is represented to be, where there is a complication of all kind of Misery, and nothing to be heard but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of Teeth.

I wish this was but as seriously laid to Heart as it is certainly true, that every man who provokes God with his impieties, is an Enemy to the publick good. He that assaults Heaven with a blasphemous Tongue, he that invokes the Sacred Name of God to attest that which is false, or to enforce that which is sinful and ought not to be done, is strictly and properly an Incendiary in the Community where he lives. For though he does not take Fire in his Hand, and set it to the Houses of the City, yet by a Tongue which is set on fire of Hell, he stirs up the divine Fury and Vengeance to break out upon us in burnings, and other direful tokens of an Angry God. He that gives up himself to rioting, drunkenness, and other debaucheries which are the fruits of such excess, is the Author of Scarcity and dearth of Provisions where he lives, both as by himself he consumes a great deal more meat and drink than properly comes to his own share, and thereby wrongs somebody else of it; and also as he provokes God to withhold those good things from us which are so vilely abused both to his and our own dishonour and reproach.

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HE that abuses the World in his Trust and Office, or in his Commerce and Dealings, is continually acting such things as tend to dissolve the Society where he lives. For his frauds help to impoverish others, and sometimes reduce them to the lowest indigence and distress; and the unjust gains which he heaps up for himself, prove no better than so many briars and thorns, always creating troubles both to himself, and to those of his Household and Posterity.

Finally, THOSE who are Enemies to Religion, and help to banish the Fear of God out of the World, by denying the Authority of his Word, or by putting a wrong sense and construction upon it, are as bad Members as can be found in any Society of men, because they do what they can to subvert the very foundations of Truth, and deprive us of the last remedy which is left to repair the breaches of Piety and Virtue in a sinful World. He who casts any slight or contempt upon the Ordinances of Religion, by neglecting them himself, or encouraging others to neglect them, is so far an Enemy to every branch of the good of human Society, which was never known to flourish in any place where the Exercise of Religion was in a low and fading condition.

THIS consideration of the publick Welfare and Prosperity, should animate every one of us with a zeal and love for the truth, upon which the publick good so entirely depends, as has been demonstrated. If we had nothing to hope or fear after this Life, yet a concern for the preservation of the City or Society where we live, should dispose us to observe the Laws of truth and righteousness in all our Actions. If these had been duly observed in *Jerusalem*, it had remained a praise upon Earth to this day. And so had many other once flourishing Cities, which are now decayed and come to nothing,

thing, because *they refused to execute Judgment, and seek after the Truth.*

WHAT is Truth, is no such slight Question, as *Pilate* made of it, when he would not stay for an answer. It comprehends every thing that is right and good. It is the vital Spirit of every Community which is well founded amongst Men. Where the name of God is sanctified, where his ordinances are duly attended, where good Laws are enacted against prophaneness and immorality, and those Laws diligently executed; in short, where that celebrated Rule is made the standard of Dealings, *That every Man do to others as he would they should do to him*, there People may be truly said to execute Judgment, and to seek after the Truth.

AND while they thus order their Conversation, they may upon the best grounds hope for the divine Blessing and Protection. Nay, where they cannot so far prevail as to make a Majority, yet if there be but a competent number who walk uprightly, God commonly for their sakes preserves the Society of which they are Members. Which should powerfully incline us to do that which is according to the Will of God, that under him we may be instruments of so much good to our Brethren; and to set a value upon those whom we see in this and in other places seeking after the Truth. *Peace be on them and Mercy*, as upon the Children of God, and worthy Members of his blessed Son, who delights in the Salvation of Mankind, and redeems us from Death no otherwise than by first redeeming us from our Sins, and conforms us to the Image of his own Holiness, in order to qualify us for his Happiness. To him, &c.





SERMON XXXVII.

On the Fifteenth Sunday after TRINITY,



JEREMIAH xxxv. 18, 19.

And Jeremiah said unto the House of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Because ye have obeyed the Commandment of Jonadab your Father, and kept all his Precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you:

Therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the Son of Rechab shall not want a Man to stand before me for ever.



HIS Chapter contains a remarkable instance of filial Obedience in the Family of the *Rechabites*, to the injunctions of their Ancestor; and it is urged here as a just reproof of the Impiety of the whole Kingdom of *Judah*, who continued in their Idolatries and other gross violations of the known Laws of God, notwithstanding the Voice of the Prophets

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Prophets which he raised up among them by a constant Succession, to inculcate his Laws upon them, to admonish them of their Enormities, and to call them to Repentance. This was a grievous aggravation of their disobedience; that they persisted in it after such incessant pains to reclaim them, while the commands of one Man, who was originally none of the stock of *Abraham*, but a Profelyte, and had been dead some ages before, were still held sacred by his Family, and honoured by all his Posterity with an inviolable Obedience.

FOR this *Jonadab* the Son of *Rechab* is the same we read of 2 *Kings* x. to whom *Jehu* said, *Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord*; and he took him along with him in his Chariot, when he went to destroy the Prophets of *Baal*. And this was about three hundred Years before this Passage here recorded of his Posterity, which happened in the days of *Jehoiakim* the Son of *Josiah*, King of *Judah*, pretty near the time of the *Babylonian Captivity*.

THAT the House of *Rechab* were but Profelytes and Sojourners in the Tribe of *Judah*, appears from 1 *Chron.* ii. ult. where *Hemath* the *Kenite* is said to be the Father of the House of *Rechab*. And the Father of these *Kenites* was *Hobab* the Son of *Jethro*, *Moses's* Father-in-Law, who had friendly correspondence with *Israel* in the Wilderness, and upon *Moses's* invitation accompanied them into the Land of *Canaan*, and afterwards sojourned in the Tribe of *Judah*, as we learn *Judges* i. 16. Though indeed the *Kenites* in general are represented as ancient Friends to the House of *Israel*, 1 *Sam.* xv. 6.

NOW this was a flagrant aggravation of the Sin of *Judah*, that the Sons of a Profelyte should pay more deference to the commands of their deceased Progenitor, than *Judah* paid to the Admonitions of God and all his Prophets.

AND

AND what were the commands of *Jonadab* to his Family? They were prohibitions of things generally useful and necessary; that they should drink no Wine, build no Houses, plant no Vineyards nor Fields, for themselves, their Wives, or Children, for ever. No doubt but this wise and good Man, (as the Sacred History, *2 Kings* x. represents him) saw sufficient reason for these injunctions. But however, our own human nature will teach us, that his Off-spring, in the course of several Ages, must endure many hardships by reason of these Curbs and Restraints. To be debarred the use of Wine in all cases of Faintness and Infirmary, seems prejudicial to the Constitution: To be exposed in Tents to the inclemency of Wind and Weather at all Seasons, and in all accidents of Storm and Tempest, may seem hazardous, especially to sick People and young Children.

AND yet these methods of living were not without ancient Example and Authority; for the Patriarchs dwelt in Tents, and so did the *Kenites* long before the days of *Jonadab*, as we learn from the History of *Jael* the Wife of *Heber* the *Kenite*, in the Book of *Judges*; and it was of old, and still is, a piece of Religion in many Eastern Countries to abstain from Wine; which was forbidden no doubt in consideration both of the strong Temptations, and dangerous consequences of drinking it intemperately in those hot Countries. It was indeed an Extream, but it was an Extream on the safer side, wholly to prohibit it.

HOWEVER, the *Rechabites* governed themselves in these particulars upon a principle of Obedience to the paternal authority of their Ancestor. And for this they have the high praise and approbation of God himself, who engages to bless and prosper them for ever upon this very account.

WHENCE we may observe these three things.

I. THAT

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I. THAT in Matters of an indifferent Nature, which God has neither commanded nor forbidden, the Determinations of human Authority shall be binding to all those who are in a state of Subjection, and live under that Authority.

II. THAT Obedience to such Determinations is highly pleasing to God.

III. THAT it is a special Argument and Motive to obey the more express and immediate Commands of God.

AND, I. We learn from this Passage, that Obedience is due to Parents and Governours in things which God has not commanded. It is enough that he has not forbidden them. That leaves room for the discretionary Power and Directions of Superiors.

AND such a Power is absolutely necessary for the Government of the World. For it is not possible for any Laws of God or Man to comprehend all the Circumstances of human Actions. We must be content with general Rules: Children must obey their Parents, Servants their Masters, Subjects their Governors, not only in easy, but hard Cases; not only in things that are usual and fashionable, but in things of a singular and extraordinary Nature, if they please to command them. We know the danger of an Ambassador's exceeding his Commission, though it may prove for the good of his King and Country; or of a subordinate Officer's disobeying the Orders of his Superior, though it were to do better. And there is a famous Passage in the *Roman History* of a General * who executed his own Son in the face of his Army, for fighting the Enemy contrary to his Orders, though he had obtained a notable Victory. But this great Man thought no Victory a sufficient Compensation for the ill Example, and
had

[* T. Manlius Torquatus. *vid.* Liv. lib. viii.]

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bad Consequences of Disobedience. How wisely did King *Saul* reckon he had interpreted the Divine Command of utterly destroying the *Amalekites*, with all that belonged to them, so as to spare of the best of the Flocks and the Herds for a Sacrifice to the Lord? But observe the Prophet's Resolution of this Case, *1 Sam. xv. 22. Hath the Lord as great Delight in burnt Offerings and Sacrifices, as in obeying the Voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than Sacrifice, and to hearken than the Fat of Rams. For Rebellion is as the Sin of Witchcraft, and Stubbornness as Iniquity and Idolatry.*

THESE things shew the sacred Esteem which God and Man have for Obedience. They will not allow those to whom the Command is given, to accommodate it to their own Opinions and Humours. We think we see much Inconvenience in the Restraints laid upon the *Rechabites*, and perhaps the Wisdom of God saw more; but he meddles not with that, but applauds the Obedience. He looks not at the Discretion of the Father, but the Virtue of the Children. Supposing them to have been wiser than their Father; it was no proper Subject for them to shew their Subtilty, and distinguish away the Hardships of their Duty. Their Wisdom was to obey.

It is true, as to any Law of God; it was as free for these Men to drink Wine, build Houses, and plant Vineyards, as it was for the Tribe of *Judah* where they dwelt. What a multitude of Reasons would our People have found out, to have reconciled their Duty to these Advantages? However low the Credit of the old Schoolmen is sunk amongst us, yet Distinctions abound to shift off the Yoke of human Impositions. It is thought Objection enough against them, that they are nowhere to be found in the Word of God. *Where hath he required them at our Hands?* Why even in
this,

this, that he requires us to obey our Superiors: 1 Pet. ii. 13. *Submit your selves to every Ordinance of Man for the Lord's sake.* Let those who think it a high Attainment in them to set themselves above such Ordinances, observe how, at the same time, they set themselves above the Word of God.

WHEN the all-wise Legislator was framing the fifth Precept of the Decalogue, can we imagine that he did not consider Children as well as Parents, Subjects as well as Governours: and that he did not know that the Understandings and Passions of those in Authority would lead them sometimes to make hard Laws and severe Rules? Yet he has given a general Precept to *honour*, i. e. *obey* them; and I know of no Exception in all his Word, upon the score of any Hardship or Inconvenience.

WHAT business has Religion with this, or that mode of Living, manner of Diet, or fashion in our Habitations? Certainly none at all. *Every Creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.* We may freely partake of them all with Moderation and Temperance, so long as we are at our own Choice and Disposal. But if those who have the Command over us, think fit to prescribe us any Restraints, we are bound to observe them, and must govern ourselves by their Limitations; or else there is no Meaning in the words of my Text.

SUCH Commands alter the Nature of indifferent Things, and make them become Matters of Necessity and Duty. And this happens in a thousand Instances of common Life. It is naturally lawful for every Man to exercise an honest Employment in any Place, where-ever he can gain the greatest Advantages by it. But the Laws of Cities and Societies (which are only of human Institution) shall restrain him from doing this among
 2 them,

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them, 'till he has qualified himself by their Laws. The Justice of this is no where disputed, not even by the greatest Zealots against human Impositions.

THE grand Mistake in these Cases is this, that People think it safe for them to disobey the Commands of their Superiors, when they can either do it without being discovered, or do not incur human Penalties by it. And this is the Occasion of much Disobedience in Children; that their Parents many times cannot prove their Faults, or else are too tender or too feeble to punish them. And if they can behave themselves with tolerable Reverence towards Parents, while they are under their immediate Care and Government, they think they have compleated their Obedience, and are discharged from any farther Observance of Commands when once they are grown up, and removed to some distance.

BUT the great Examples of Obedience in my Text, had larger Notions of this Duty, and did not think the Will of their Fore-father vacated by his Death, nor antiquated by the space of three hundred Years; but owned it, and observed it with all the Hardships attending it, as much as if he had been still living, and they in the state of Infancy. This God approves in them, and promises to reward them for it. Which brings me to the

II^d Observation I propos'd, THAT Obedience to the Determinations of our Governors, in things otherwise of an indifferent Nature, is highly pleasing to God.

WHEN the Necessaries and Accommodations of Life are all left to our Choice without Exception, we may freely make a moderate Use of such of them as we like best, without any Offence to the supreme Donor. It is equal to him whether we drink Wine or other kind of Liquors, whether
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we build our Houses, or wear our Clothes after this or that Fashion. There is neither moral good nor evil in such circumstances. But if our Parents, our Guides and Governors lay a Restraint upon us in any of these things, whatever they prohibit becomes thenceforth as unlawful to us, as the Tree of Knowledge in Paradise; not for any intrinsic Evil in it; but by virtue of the Interdict laid upon it by those who are unto us in God's stead, and whom we are to hear and regard, as if God did immediately speak to us.

NOR that we are bound to esteem the Determinations of fallible Men to be as wise and good, as if they came from God's own Mouth; nor are we obliged to wink so hard as not to see an obvious Defect or Excess in some human Injunctions, nor to be so insensible as not to feel a Hardship, and dutifully to apply for the Redress of it. Men may know these Imperfections in the Ordinances of Men, and yet obey them with Modesty and Respect; for God knows them, and yet he owns the Authority by which they are appointed, and commands it to be obeyed.

I do think, and I may think it without Prejudice to sacred Writ; or the Character of this holy Man, that God himself would not have laid such Restraints upon the *Rechabites* as their Ancestor did. For I do not believe that good Men were acted by Divine Impulse in these indifferent things. It is not *Jonadab* whom God praises for these Injunctions, but his Posterity for their strict religious Observance of his Authority.

AND so it is in all Governments, Military or Civil; the Sovereign supports the Authority of his subordinate Officers. If he gives any of them a discretionary Power over any District, he will punish the People of such District for disobeying his Officer, though he might not manage things
so

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so well and wisely as the Sovereign himself would have done!

AND therefore God, the supreme Governour of all, delights in our Obedience to those whom he hath set in Authority over us, though he knows they are but Men, of like Passions and Infirmities with our selves. And he has given large Demonstrations of his Pleasure in such Obedience, by blessing it, as he here promises in my Text, so long as ever it lasts, not only in particular Families, but in whole Nations and Kingdoms. In his own People first, whose Prosperity may plainly be seen to have kept time with their Obedience to their Princes, Priests, and Prophets. And next in the *Pagan* Monarchies of the World, which all in their several Turns attained to their Grandeur and Glory by a strict Discipline; and lost it again by the Relaxation and Decay of it. And I might appeal to the very *Mahometans* at this Day, who however absurd in their Religion and Laws, yet have raised and maintained themselves hitherto in a formidable Greatness, by a strict and ready Execution of the Commands of their Superiors. But I hasten to the

III^d and last Thing I propos'd, which was to shew, what a good Argument and Motive this sort of Obedience is, to our doing the more special and express Will of God.

AND St. *Paul* argues very properly and strongly from this Topick, *Heb. xii. 9.* that if we once have a just Sense of our Duty to our Parents according to the Flesh, much more reason shall we see to yield Obedience to the Father of Spirits, who is the Fountain of Life and Happiness, and can command us nothing but what is highly conducive thereunto. If we learn to bear this domestick Yoke of Discipline in Childhood and Youth, we shall be the more easy under Christ's

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Yoke in our Manhood and advanced Years. Obedience to the Fifth Commandment is the first Thing that we have to learn, and it is a good Foundation for all the rest. We cannot doubt but the Family in my Text, so celebrated for this, had a proportionable Piety in all other Respects. We may often see it in our own Experience; at least we cannot help seeing its contrary. How monstrous and awkward was the Religion of those Men amongst us in the Days of our Forefathers, who threw off all Obedience, nay made it even a Merit and a Duty to violate and trample upon every Ordinance of Man? And the Poison was so rank, and has so spread its Infection even down to our own times, that that Part of our Catechism which teaches *to submit to Governors, Teachers, Spiritual Pastors and Masters*, is left to little Children at petty Schools; very few of our Flocks thinking themselves one jot more obliged by any Admonitions or Exhortations of their Shepherd, I will not say to submit to him in things of his own prescribing, but even in those general and publick Duties of our Religion, without which we cannot be Christians: Although we say all that Christ and the Prophets and Apostles have said, to convince them of the Necessity of such Obedience. True it is, that when earthly Powers command any thing which is contrary to plain moral Virtue, or the express Word of God, then all who are under their Authority, are exempted from active Obedience by that infallible Rule, *That it is meet to obey God rather than Man*. And by this Rule all holy Martyrs and Confessors for Religion are justified. But then we must be very sure that there is an Opposition between the Will of God and Man, before we venture to disobey Parents, Masters, and lawful Governours. Our own Scruples or private Interpretations

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pretations of difficult Scriptures, or Wisdom in seeing a better Way than our Governours direct, is no sufficient Warrant for such Disobedience. It is too well known amongst us, that innumerable Mischiefs, Disorders, and Impieties have been occasioned by such Pretences. And I question whether in any thing God has been more highly provoked, and his sacred Laws more confidently trampled upon, than by an ignorant, or wilful perverting of this Rule, *That we should obey God rather than Man*; which though most excellent in its genuine Sense and Meaning, yet has been most horribly abused to countenance all the Rebellion, Contumacy, and Contempt of Authority in the World.

GOD, who is the Fountain of Authority and good Government, has constituted various Orders of Angels and Men, appointing some to command, and others to obey: And the confounding of these Orders has been the Occasion of Rebellion in Heaven and in Earth. It is the infernal Spark which has kindled Civil Wars in Kingdoms, and Hatred, Variance, and Strife in private Families. For if we look about us, we shall find, that those who have been the greatest Opposers of the Magistrates and Ministers under whom they have lived, have generally had most Trouble in the Management of their own domestick Affairs, and been soundly mortified with the rebellious Manners of their own Children. And that not only by the just Judgment of God, but even by the natural and necessary Course of their own Conduct. For the Example of their own insolent and contemptuous Carriage towards their Governours, destroys in their Children all Reverence and Respect both towards themselves and others.

To conclude then; Let every one, who is desirous to maintain his own Station and Dignity in the

World, render unto all men that share of Honour and Respect which is due to their Persons, Professions, or Conditions of what sort soever. For there can be no fear of God, where there is no regard of man : and Children who were never taught reverence to their Parents, will hardly shew any to Magistrates and Ministers. But those who have been accustomed to the yoke of good discipline in their tender years, are most likely to become instruments of honour to God, and benefit and comfort to all their Relations, Friends, and Neighbours ; through the Grace and Blessing of Jesus Christ, to whom &c.



SERMON



SERMON XXXVIII.

On the Sixteenth Sunday after TRINITY.



EZEK. ii. 7.

*And thou shalt speak my Words unto them,
whether they will hear, or whether they
will forbear, for they are most rebellious.*

EZEKIEL the Priest, the Son of Buzi, of the Family of Aaron, was contemporary with Jeremiah, for he prophesied in the fifth year of the Captivity of Jehoiachin, Grand-son of Josiah King of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away Captive into Chaldea, several years before the Destruction of Jerusalem, together with many thousands of the People, among whom the Prophet Ezekiel was one, whose Habitation was allotted him near the River Chebar, a River which rises in the borders of Armenia the greater, and runs through Mesopotamia into the River Euphrates; near the confluence of these Rivers it seems the Prophet had his residence. From his place he

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was convey'd in a vision to *Jerusalem*, and there shown all the several sorts of Idolatry which the Inhabitants of that City committed, together with a Revelation of the Punishments which God was about to inflict upon them for such Abominations. At the same time he promises those of the Captivity who stedfastly and faithfully adhered to the true Religion, that God would be their Sanctuary in this strange Land, and bring them back again in due time to their Native Countrey, and there cause them to flourish in Peace and Righteousness, as in former times. All which the Prophet declared to the *Jews* that were Captives in *Chaldea*, among whom he dwelt.

IN the figure of his Vision he sets forth God as sitting upon a Throne supported by four Cherubims, holding forth with his right hand the Scepter of Mercy and Peace to all those Worshipers who are sprinkled with the blood of the unspotted Lamb; and brandishing with his other hand the Sword of Divine vengeance over the heads of all idolatrous and ungodly People.

HE notes notwithstanding the monstrous perverseness of the People of *Israel*, who though they above all Nations had seen the hands of the divine Majesty stretched out, both for their Protection and their Punishment, according to their various demerits, yet so prone were they to be seduced by their false Prophets, by their own Lusts, and by the dumb Idols of the Heathen, that they would rush upon Sword, Famine, Pestilence, and Captivity, rather than hearken to the loud and manifest warnings of the Lord their God.

SUCH are they represented to be in the words of my Text, which contains two things worthy our consideration.

I. THE manifestation of God's goodness in sending his Prophets and Ministers to instruct his
People

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People in the knowledge of his Ways and the works of his Commandments.

II. THE unworthy contempts and affronts which men commonly put upon such Ministry.

And 1st, THE ordinary way which God provided for the instruction of his People, in the duties of Religion, was this. He caused his Laws to be written in Books, and put into the hands of Masters of Families; so that from what we read in Sacred Writ, we may reasonably conclude that no Family was without the five Books of *Moses*; and many no doubt had other Pious Books, as we have at this day. As to the Decalogue, and other parts of the Divine Law, there are very strict injunctions upon Parents, *Deut. vi.* to be continually teaching and instilling them into their Children, morning and evening, at home and abroad. These Laws they are commanded to write upon the doors and gates of their Houses, and to peruse them as constantly as if they were signets upon their hands and frontlets between their eyes. This shews how much the Masters of Families were bound to teach every one his Household the Commandments, Statutes and Judgments of the Lord their God.

BUT besides this private method of teaching, we may observe that the Priests and *Levites* were dispersed through all the Tribes of *Israel*, of whom *Moses* says, *Deut. xxxiii.* *they shall teach Jacob thy Judgments, and Israel thy Laws:* And the Prophet *Malachi* says, *ii. 7.* *That the Priest's lips should keep knowledge, and that the People should seek the Law at his mouth; for he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts.* Whence it appears, that the Priests and *Levites* were appointed, not only to offer Sacrifices and perform other services at the Tabernacle and Temple, but likewise to read and explain the Word of God to the People in their several Towns and Cities, and to stir them up by proper Exhorta-

tions to the Observance of it. This Ministry was certainly a branch of the Priests Office, which when they neglected, God complained of them by his Prophets, *that his People perished for want of that knowledge of his Laws*, which it was their Part and Duty to teach them, or were corrupted by the false glosses which they put upon his Word, and the ill example which they set them.

WHAT Places they had for publick Teaching, besides the Tabernacle and Temple, we have not any certain information before the *Babylonian Captivity*, because we have no *Rabbinical Writers* extant before that time. But two things we are certain of.

1st, THAT if the Priests and *Levites* had been confined to teach Religion no where but at one certain place, such as the Tabernacle or Temple, they would have been able to do very little good this way, among the many thousands of *Israel*, many of whom could but rarely in their whole Life resort to these places, by reason of necessary business, infirmities, and their great distance from the Metropolis. So that the Tribe of *Levi* could have been but of small use to them, if they had not been permitted to teach People in some convenient places, nigh their respective Habitations; as no doubt they might, for the reason of teaching makes this necessary, and we no where find any prohibition to the contrary. Indeed the Sacred Writers express a dislike of the Groves and High Places which were used for Divine Worship: but the reason of their dislike was, either because the People who frequented those places, built Altars and offered Sacrifice and other Offerings there, which by the Law might be offered no where but at the Temple; or else because their Teachers invaded the Office, without being appointed by a sufficient

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sufficient Authority. But if they were duly appointed, and medled not with the Offerings peculiar to the Temple, nor hindered people from resorting to it at the prescribed Seasons, they might pray and teach in such Places, without offending against any Law.

2. It is said, *Psal. lxxiv. 8.* that the Enemies of *Israel* had burnt up all the Houses of God in the Land. Now that Psalm appears, by many passages in it, to have been composed by *Asaph*, a descendent no doubt, and of the same Family with former Holy Men of that Name, in contemplation of the havock made of *Jerusalem* and all *Judea* by the *Chaldeans*. And the passage I have quoted is authority sufficient for us to affirm, that the Jews of those times had other places beside the Temple, for publick Assemblies to pray together, and hear the Word of God.

AFTER their return from *Babylon*, these places were known by the name of Synagogues, a *Greek* word introduced by the *Hellenistick Jews*, who read the Scriptures in the Version of the *LXX*. And these Synagogues were so frequent in *Jewry*, that it was customary to erect one in every place, where there were ten Persons of full Age, and such plentiful Circumstances, as to be always at leisure to attend the service of it. And in populous Cities their number was proportioned to the exigences of the People, particularly in *Tiberias*, Jewish Writers tell us there were twelve, and in *Jerusalem* four hundred and eighty.

THE Services to be performed in these Synagogues were Prayers, reading the Scriptures, and preaching and expounding upon them. Their Prayers were common prescribed forms, few at first, but afterwards extended to a large Number: eighteen of them were very ancient, used no doubt in our Saviour's time; and consequently he joyned
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in them with the rest of the *Jews*, whenever he went into their Synagogues, as he always did every Sabbath Day.

THE other parts of their Service were reading, expounding and preaching upon Holy Scripture. They expounded as they read, and preached after the Reading. These two last might be performed by any Layman of sufficient Abilities. Our Lord taught in the Synagogues both these ways. When he was at his own City *Nazareth*, he was called out, as a Member of that Synagogue, to read the Section or Lesson of the Day, *Luke iv.* When he read, he stood up, and when he expounded he sat down, according to the usage of the *Jews* in both these cases, who stood up in reverence to the Sacred Text, and sat in regard to themselves as Teachers. In all other Synagogues, Christ when he was present, taught the People in Sermons, after the Scriptures had been read and expounded by somebody else: The like did *St. Paul* in the Synagogue of *Antioch* in *Pisidia*, *St. Luke* his attendant expressly noting, that his preaching was after the reading of the Law and the Prophets.

THIS is a brief account of the conveniencies with respect to Place, which the *Israelites* had to hear the Word of God. Their Synagogues, according to what I have noted, might well be supposed to be more frequent than Churches are in our Christian Countries.

As for the times and seasons which they set apart for these religious Exercises, we may be sure the Sabbath or seventh Day was one, and that from the very Style of the Law, which commands it to be kept Holy. But it would be a strange way of sanctifying this day, to spend it in meer inactivity, or wanton Sports and Pastimes; though some Societies of *Jews* in Christian Countries have been so sensual as to think this Rest was granted them for

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no better purposes. But their Ancestors assure us, that *Moses of old time had in every City them that preached him, being read in the Synagogues every Sabbath Day,* as we read *Acts xv. 21.* Besides this, they had several Fasts and Festivals, as we have, whereon they assembled for religious Worship. And besides these solemn times, *Maimonides in Tephillah* assures us, that they performed their ordinary Synagogue-service on *Mondays and Thursdays every Week.*

As thus they had opportunity three days in seven for hearing the Word of God in their Synagogues, so thrice on every of those days they said their Prayers in those Places. For it was a constant rule among them, that all were bound to pray to God three times a day, viz. at the times of Morning and Evening Sacrifice, and at the beginning of Night.

THESE times of Prayer were of very ancient usage among the People of God; for Holy *David, Psalm lv, saith, in the Evening and Morning, and at Noon-day will I pray, and that instantly, and he shall bear my Voice:* and *Daniel in Babylon opened his Windows towards Jerusalem, and kneeled down and prayed, and gave thanks to God three times a day, as he did afore-time.* Whence it is plain, that these Hours of Prayer were not introduced after the *Babylonian Captivity,* but were of longer standing.

THUS we have taken a view of the settled Provisions and Opportunities which the *Israelites* had for the publick Worship of God; which if they had attended with constancy and reverence, they had preserved themselves in his true Faith and Worship, and consequently escaped those Judgments of Pestilence, War, and Captivity, which their Impieties and Idolatries drew upon them. This brings me in the

III^d Place to speak of their Abuses of the Means of divine Communion which God afforded them.

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WE read several times in the History of this People, that the Divine Law was so slighted among them, *that every Man did that which was right in his own Eyes.* Which is telling us in effect, that they were a Law to themselves, took what liberties they pleased to absent themselves from the Assemblies of Divine Worship, and so by degrees made those places desolate and unfrequented. How could it be otherwise in those ages which were grown so profane, that even *Solomon's Temple* was filled with Rubbish, and the Book of the Law so neglected, that it was buried and lost under the heaps of it.

WHEN the ordinances of God, which were settled with the greatest Solemnity and full demonstrations of his power and pleasure, were thus trampled upon, as we read they were, it had been just with him to cast such a rebellious People out of his sight, without striving by any farther means to reclaim them from the evil of their ways. However, to magnifie his own infinite Goodness, and to save a remnant which had been carried away with the Errors of the Wicked, through the iniquities of the times they lived in, he raised up Prophets from time to time, to carry them immediate Messages from his own Mouth, and warn them of the Calamities which were coming upon them. The *Babylonian Captivity* was foretold by many Prophets, particularly by those two noble and eminent ones, *Isaiab* and *Jeremiab*, several years before it was accomplished; the Sins which occasioned it were fully discovered, and the People called to Repentance, in order to prevent it. Yet these excellent Men, who sufficiently proved that they spoke by the Spirit of God, were exploded by the great ones of their times as Impostors and Liars, and were hunted into Prisons and to Death; while those that prophesied contrary things were rewarded with the fa-
vours

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vours and smiles of their Governors. *Isaiab* bitterly complains of the contemptuous scornful Spirit which exalted it self against him; *xlvi. 4. Thy neck, says he, is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; and lxx. 2. All day long have I stretched forth my hand to a disobedient and gain-saying people.* *Jeremiah* was made the subject of publick Derision and Mockery: *all his acquaintance watched for his halting, xx. 10.* they sought to lay hold of something in his Words or Actions, whereon they might accuse him and ruin him. When his Prophecie, written on a Roll of Parchment, was laid before *Jehoiakim*, Son of *Josiah* King of *Judah*, Chap. xxxvi. he cut it to pieces and threw it into the Fire, and sought after the Prophet to imprison him or destroy him. And when they saw his Predictions verified in the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and pretended then to value him, and *Johanan*, with the Captains and remains of their Forces besought him to enquire of God for them, what course they should take in this extremity, chap. xlii. and solemnly swore to obey the Answer, whether it should seem good or evil to them; yet when he told them it was the will of God that they should abide in their own land, and not go to sojourn in *Egypt*, as then they intended; because this answer crost their Intentions, they confidently told him *he spoke falsely, and that the Lord had not sent him, but that he sought to deliver them into hand of the Chaldeans;* and thus, notwithstanding their Oath of Obedience, they went down into *Egypt*, and carried the Prophet along with them.

THIS makes it the less surprizing to us, to hear the Character which God gives them in my Text, that when the Captivity was begun, and many of them were carried away to *Babylon*, even then they continued to be most rebellious; as this Prophet has informed us that he found it,

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in the Accounts which he has recorded of their Hardness and Impenitence to the last. Finally, all the Prophets agree in declaiming against their Pride and Atheism, and Forgetfulness of God, upbraiding them with their Ingratitude and Insensibility, that they were not capable of being converted and saved by any Methods, either of Judgment or Mercy; they treat them as People that had neither Eyes to see, nor Ears to hear; they cry out *to Heaven and Earth to bear the Word of the Lord*; Hai. i. 2. intimating thereby, that the inanimate Part of the Creation was as likely to regard them as these Men. Such was the incurable Obstinacy of the main Body of this People, in all Circumstances, happy and miserable, in *Canaan*, or in *Chaldea*, under the settled Ordinances of Religion, or the extraordinary Ministration of their Prophets.

THIS is a proper Warning to all those of the present Generation, who continue in their Sins, while the Means of divine Grace abound towards them. They may harden their Hearts until they are past feeling, and go on in their evil Ways so far, 'till all the Powers of Heaven and Earth cannot turn them. For this is the dreadful Consequence of resisting and despising the Means of Grace, that the unhappy Sinner is daily more perplexed and entangled in the Cords of his Sins, the Spirit of God ceases to strive with him, his Conscience no longer reproves him, no degree of Spiritual Life remains in him, he is dead in Sins and Trespases.

IT is an Observation of one of our ancient Fathers, proper to be mentioned on this occasion, and it is grounded upon a Saying of the wise Solomon, *That God has provided no Remedy for Obstinacy*. The proud Scornor, and Vilifier of holy Things, must fall into inevitable Destruction.

Other

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Other Sins are not so rivetted and complicated in the Heart of Man, but that they may be drawn out of it. A lustful *Magdalen*, a worldly *Zaccheus*, a rich *Nicodemus*, have easily been persuaded to forsake their Errors and follow Christ: But a proud conceited *Pharisee*, who turns the Gospel into Burlesque and Ridicule, withstands the last and strongest Means of Grace, and laughs himself into final Impenitence.

2. HENCE we learn the Patience and Long-suffering of God towards the worst of Men; how long he waits to be gracious, *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.* He knew that this People was most rebellious, and that the far greatest Part of them would hear nothing of his Will; yet he sends his Prophet after them, even in their Captivity, to teach them how to sanctify this Affliction, and help them to recover their Souls from the Tyranny of the Devil, to whom they had been long enslaved. Temporal Sufferings are a proper Means to humble ungodly Men, to mollify their hard Hearts, to awaken them out of that Security which was the Effect of former Prosperity, and to shew them that Salvation is of the Lord. But however, when God sees that his Corrections will not dispose Men to return to him, yet he continues to invite them for the Manifestation of his Goodness, that the World may see and be witness how loth he is to punish, and how much he delights to exercise Loving-kindness towards the Children of Men. There is a Passage frequently repeated in the Prophet *Jeremiah*, which well declares the Goodness of God in this Dispensation. It is most full *Jer. viii. 25.* *Since the day that your Fathers came forth out of the Land of Egypt, unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my Servants the Prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they hearkened*
not

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not unto me, nor inclined their Ears; but hardened their Neck, they did worse than their Fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these Words unto them, but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a Nation that obeyeth not the Voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth Correction: Truth is perished, and is cut off from their Mouth. But

LASTLY, and to conclude; Since God waits with so much Patience to be gracious to an unworthy People, the Ministers and Dispensers of his Grace are bound to imitate him herein, and speak all his Words to such People, *whether they will bear, or whether they will forbear.* For he is Lord of all, and must be served in his own way, and not at the Discretion of those who are but Instruments in his Hands. He knows who are his Children, and at what Time, and by what Motives their Hearts shall be touched, *and turned from Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Sin and Satan unto God.* His Children are but a very small and select number, out of Multitudes which are as the Sand upon the Sea-shore. And though they should bear no more proportion to the Rebels, than they did in *Israel*, in the Days of *Elijah*, yet for their Sakes God thinks it worth while to continue the publick Ministry of his Word and Sacraments. Though all the rest should be as stiff-hearted, as much Briers and Thorns, and Scorpions to the Christian Minister, as *Israel* was to the Prophet *Ezekiel*, yet it is worth while to sow the Seed of the Word, though it light but upon one good Heart in such a Multitude of Scorners. Christ himself and his Apostles had but a handful of their numerous Hearers, who proved Doers of God's Word. And though we have no manner of Grounds to promise our selves greater Conversions, yet we are very sure that our Heavenly
Father

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Father is always pleased with us, when we pray to him to have Mercy upon all Men, and to take from them all Rebellion, Hardness of Heart, and Contempt of his Word and Commandment, and so to fetch them home to his own Flock, that they may be saved among the Remnant of true *Israelites*, and become one Fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father, &c.





SERMON XXXIX.

On the Seventeenth Sunday after TRINITY.



EZEK. xiv. 7.

For every one of the House of Israel, or of the Stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his Idols in his Heart, and putteth the Stumbling-block of his Iniquity before his Face, and cometh to a Prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will answer him by myself.



THIS is Part of the Answer which the Prophet *Ezekiel* returned from God, to certain of the chief Men of *Israel*, when they came to him to desire him to ask Counsel of the Lord, what they should do to extricate themselves from the Hardships of War and Captivity, which were brought upon them by the *Babylonians*. God's Answer was agreeable to the Merits of the Enquirers. ' *These Men*, says he, ver. 3. *have set up their Idols in their*

“*their Hearts, and put the Stumbling-block of their Iniquity before their face; and do they consult me while they are so affected? Let them repent and turn from their Idols, and turn away their Faces from all their Abominations, and make themselves my People, and then I will be their God.*”

THIS was the Condition upon which God would lend an Ear to their Prayers, and stretch out his Hand for their Deliverance. So long as they addicted themselves to the Worship of other Gods, it was very meet and right, that they should look to them for Help in the Day of Adversity, and experience their Folly in depending upon such Helpers as had no Power to save. This was the fair and equal Reference which God made upon other Occasions. Thus we read *Judges x.* that when *Israel*, being invaded by a great Army of *Ammonites*, cried unto the Lord to shew them a Way for their Deliverance, his Answer was, *Go cry unto the Gods whom ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your Tribulation.* So likewise *2 Kings iii.* when *Jehoram*, Son of *Abah*, King of *Israel*, addressed himself to *Elisba* to obtain succour for him against the *Moabites*, *What have I to do with thee,* said *Elisba*: *Get thee to the Prophets of thy Father and of thy Mother.* And such Returns we find in other Sayings of holy Prophets, to upbraid an impious People with the Vanity of their Idols.

AND yet notwithstanding this palpable Vanity and Imbecillity of Idols, so prone has the World ever been to invent and run after strange Gods, that it is hard to find any Age or Nation wherein this Madness has not prevailed. As to the antediluvian World, all our History of it being no more than what is contained in the first six Chapters of *Genesis*, we can make but very slender Con-

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jectures of the State of its Religion in this respect. *Tertullian* indeed thought that Idolatry began in the Days of *Seth*, and *Enoch* restored true Religion, and is for that Reason said in Scripture, *to have walked with God*. But he has concealed his Ground of this Opinion; and we can find nothing so likely to move him to it, as the Esteem he had for the apocryphal Prophecy of *Enoch*, in which are contained severe Threatnings both against the Makers and Worshippers of Idols.

BUT certain it is, that quickly after the World was restored from the Destruction made by the Flood, Idolatry sprung up among the renewed and multiplied Race of Men, in that exorbitant Honour which they paid to the Souls of their famous Ancestors, and to the Host of Heaven, the Sun, Moon, and Stars, which were notoriously idolized in the Days of *Job*, as we learn by his Protestation of his own Innocence in this respect. Ch. xxxi. *If I beheld the Sun, says he, when it shined, or the Moon walking in Brightness: and my Heart hath been secretly inticed, or my Mouth hath kissed my Hand [in token of Adoration] this were Iniquity to be punished by the Judge; for I should have denied the God that is above.* And *Diodorus Siculus*, who was born and bred up in Idolatry, has this Remark in his historical Library, lib. 1. 'That the most ancient Inhabitants of the Earth, (meaning those that lived soon after the Flood, and particularly the *Egyptians*,) contemplating the World above them, and being astonished with high Admiration of the Nature of the Universe, believed that there were eternal Gods, and that the two principal of them were the Sun and the Moon: Of which they called the first *Osiris*, and the second *Isis*.' These were the visible Parts of the Creation, which were most anciently and universally idolized, as we may collect from

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from our discoveries of the *American* Countries, where different People have been found to have their peculiar Idols; but the Sun was every where esteemed a Deity.

To come now to the Religion of the People of *Israel*: *Abraham*, the Founder of their Nation, is the first man that we read of in his time, who made open profession of the true God. So generally was the World then over-run with Idolatry; his own Father's house not being free from it. For which reason God commanded him to leave his Family and his Countrey, and to reside in such places where he might exercise his Religion, with less temptation to depart from it. Not but that he found opposition from Idolaters, besides other hardships of his Pilgrimage; which rendered his Faith so superlatively glorious, and gave occasion to the Prophets and Apostles so highly to celebrate him, as one that had the courage to profess the true God in a World of Idolaters, and took care, according to the Testimony which God hath given of him, *to teach his Children and his Household after him, that they should keep the way of the Lord.*

ABRAHAM was certainly very careful in this matter; and his near descendants, I mean his Son and Grand-son, *Isaac* and *Jacob*, trode in his steps; but his remoter Posterity sadly degenerated from their Fathers Faith. Let us look a little into the causes and degrees of their degeneracy.

THE first time that we read of Idols in *Jacob*, is *Gen. xxxi.* where *Rachel* is said to have stolen the Images of *Laban* her Father, which he calls his Gods. Their name in the original is *Teraphim*, which differing but one letter from *Seraphim*, has induced some to think that they were Images dedicated to some Angels: And that *Rachel* stole them, either for the value of the metal, or that

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her Father might not divine by them, which way her Family had made their escape from him. Whatever they were, or for what end soever taken away, we are sure they were taken without the privity of *Jacob*, who when he discovered them, demanded them of his Wives, and buried them under an Oak near *Shechem*, as we learn *Gen. xxxv.* and so they had no farther bad influence in his Family.

THE next perilous time of Idolatry to the *Israelites*, was, when they went down in a Famine of Bread to sojourn in that great School of Idol-worship, the Land of *Egypt*, and continued there till God delivered them by the hand of *Moses* and *Aaron*. Though the divine Providence had so ordered it, that they should dwell by themselves in the land of *Goshen*, yet afterwards it is certain that they mingled with these Heathen, and learned their ways. The Jewish Doctors tell us, that all the Tribes were here tainted with Idolatry, except the Tribe of *Levi*, of which *Moses* and *Aaron* were descended, who were therefore more fit to reform this People, and reduce them to the Religion of their Fathers.

No Care was wanting in them, nor in God by them, to effect this. The whole body of their Laws, Moral, Ritual, and Judicial, was composed with this view. Every page of them is seasoned with some antidote against Idolatry. The two first Commandments of the Decalogue oblige men to worship one God in a spiritual way, without Images. Death without Mercy is denounced against those who shall but attempt to seduce them to the contrary.

AND yet it is evident, from various passages of Sacred Writ, that during their forty years wandering in the Wilderness, they never were thoroughly weaned from the Idols of *Egypt*.
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After they had been terrified with Thunderings and Lightnings, and the voice of God, at the delivery of the Law from Mount *Sinai*, yet because *Moses* spent more time in receiving it than they expected, they fell into the shameful idolatry of the Golden Calf. When afterwards they came into the borders of *Moab*, and by their abode there contracted some acquaintance with the *Moabites*, they accepted of their invitations to the Sacrifices of their Gods, *and joined themselves unto Baal-peor, and eat the offerings of the dead.* And at last, when *Joshua* had settled them in their long-desired *Canaan*, and was taking his leave of them, as being near his End, he found it necessary, in his farewell Oration, to insist chiefly upon their putting away strange Gods from among them, and adhering to the Religion of their Fathers. And though they very solemnly plighted their Faith to him, to do all that he required of them, yet the History of the succeeding Judges contains little else but Narratives of their frequent lapses into Idolatry, and grievous sufferings for the same.

MUCH to the same purpose with *Joshua's* last Exhortation, are those words of *Samuel*, the last of their Judges, 1 Sam. vii. *If you do return to the Lord with all your Hearts, then put away the strange Gods, and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your Hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines. Then the Children of Israel put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only.*

A very little while it was, after they had been erected into a Kingdom, that their Kings themselves became the Authors and Patrons of Idolatry among them. *Solomon*, the third in Succession, who excelled in wisdom, wealth and grandeur, and was blest with so much Peace and Plenty, that he had both time and means to build God a

magnificent House, yet he unhappily sullied the Glory of his great Abilities and rare Atchievements, by suffering himself to be seduced to Idolatry by the persuasion of his Heathen Wives and Concubines. For he went after *Ashtoreth* the Goddess of the *Sidonians*, he built an High Place for *Chemosh* the abomination of *Moab*, in the Hill that is before *Jerusalem*; and for *Molech* the abomination of the Children of *Ammon*. And the like he did for all his strange Wives, burning Incense, and sacrificing to their Gods. 1 Kings xi.

THIS provoked God to take from his Family the ten Tribes of *Israel*, and give them to his Servant *Jeroboam* to reign over them, with a promise to continue this Kingdom in his Family, in case he would keep the Laws and Ordinances of God. Yet neither had he the Faith to depend upon his high Benefactor, for the continuance of this blessing which he had so manifestly conferred upon him; but corrupted Religion so grossly as to merit the character of the King who made *Israel* to sin.

FROM henceforth very few Kings of *Israel* or *Judah* were free from Idolatry: which brought both Nations into Captivity; *Israel* by *Salmanasser* King of *Assyria*, and *Judah* by *Nebuchadnezzar* King of *Babylon*.

AND here should end our account of Jewish Idolatries; if their Captivities had so effectually cured them of this sin, as some have imagined. But the ancient Author of the first Book of *Maccabees*, who writ their History in that interval of time between the last of the Prophets and the coming of Christ, informs us, that long after their return from *Babylon*, when *Antiochus Epiphanes* King of *Syria* prevailed over them, and set up the Statue of *Jupiter Olympius* on the Altar of their second Temple, which was enough to have moved pious men

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men to have fled from the City, many of the *Israelites*, either out of fear or inclination, consented to be of the King's Religion, and *sacrificed to his Idols, and profaned the Sabbath*; as we read *1 Maccab. i. 43.*

Now what could be more provoking to God, than these mens frequent relapses into this Sin of Idolatry, after he had given them such strong Arguments and Reasons against it! shewing them by manifold Calamities, Slaughters, Outrages of all kinds, which he suffered their Enemies to commit upon them, when they forsook him, that it was not in the power of their Idols to relieve them: putting them so often in mind, as he does by his Prophets, that he had separated them from the Heathen to be his peculiar People, to maintain the knowledge and fear of the true God among men; to which they could not do a greater prejudice, than to prefer the service of Idols before him; for this was in effect to tell the World, that they held Idols to be better Masters and greater Benefactors than their God, whom they had try'd and known by many years experience. This indeed was the obvious Sense which People would put upon such their practice. Than which, as nothing could be more derogatory to the honour of God, so nothing could be more false and slanderous; it being evident by abundance of instances, that their Piety and Prosperity, and their Idolatry and Adversity, always went together. God had expressly stipulated with them to afford them his Protection, as they should yield him their Obedience; the very Land in which they dwelt, was given them upon no other condition; the former Inhabitants were cast out by reason of their vile Idolatries and Abominations, and *Israel* was planted in their room with the character of a Holy People, and servants of the true God. When they had

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had lost this character, they had fairly forfeited their Land, and were justly banished, and mingled among the Heathen, whose Sins and Impieties they had practised. Such were the very Articles of the Covenant, by which they held their Inheritance. They were often put in mind of them, and admonished to beware of falling into and persisting in such Sins, as would incur the forfeiture of God's Protection.

AND therefore with just indignation it is, that God demands here, by the Prophet *Ezekiel*, with what face any Men, *Israelites* or Strangers, could apply to him for relief and comfort in their Distress, when their Hearts were attached to the love of their Idols: Since he has made such plain Declarations, and even common sense might serve to inform them, that he cannot be favourable to them, so long as they are so wickedly affected. For this would be to encourage and support them in the breach of his own Laws, which is inconsistent with his Wisdom, Holiness, Truth, and all his Attributes.

AND therefore however idolatrous and impious Men may prosper in the World, their prosperity cannot be the effect of God's Love and Approbation of them: But is given them either for the punishment of others, upon whom they exercise their Pride, Avarice, and Cruelty; or for their own greater Condemnation at last, while they receive so many good things, and will not see the Hand which exhibits them; though it be far more evidently the cause of them, than those stupid Idols, to which they most absurdly and wrongfully ascribe them.

BUT I must not forget to observe, that the words of my Text are a Reproof, not only to those who practise external Idolatry, but likewise to those who are under the dominion of their own Lusts
and

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and Passions, which carry them away as strongly from the love of God, as if they were acted by a Legion of evil Angels. In this sense the words are of great Latitude, and serve for a proper admonition to us all, to take heed that we offend not God by Self-love, by doing our own Will. Every stubborn presumptuous Sinner sets up the Idol of his Lust in his own Heart, and when he comes to enquire of God, he shall have no other answer than such an Idolater deserves. When he offers up his Prayers, or hears the divine Word, or performs any other religious Duty, God accepts him not as his Servant, nor admits him to any filial Communion with him, but sets his face against him, and regards him as an Alien and a Rebel, because he carries a strange God in his Heart, who has the prerogative of his Affections, to whose commands he yields an unlimited Obedience.

THIS concerns us all to take notice of it; for it may be any Man's Case, who lives under the most pure dispensation of Religion, where there is no Image in the Church, no Invocation of Saints or Angels, and yet the Worshipper may be a damnable Idolater. If he is full of the love of himself, and of the World, if he lives in any habitual Sin, which is flatly contrary to the known Will of God; if he flights any duty, which the word of God declares to be of great importance, and necessary to Salvation; if he be of that incorrigible Spirit, as when his sin is reproved, to swell with indignation at his Reprover, to dissemble it and deny it, or to ransack the storehouse of Sophistry to defend it: If he be got into that strong hold of hardned Offenders, *that when he is convinced, he will not own his Convictions*: This Man is a spiritual Idolater, his Heart is the Temple, or rather the Castle of his Idols, for there he fortifies them so, that nothing may dislodge them; he can be pleased with the
Stumbling-

Stumbling-block of his Iniquity, though it lies open to his eyes, and to the view of all the World. And therefore he ought to apply to himself the answer of God in this fourteenth of Ezekiel. *When such a man comes to make his address to me, in the exercise of any religious Duty, I will set my face against him, and let him know, that he is not of the number of my obedient Children.*

SINCE then any one Idol enthroned in our Heart, any unmortified Lust which reigns there, will avert the Face of God, and hinder the acceptance of all our Duties, let this recommend an universal Obedience to the divine Law. Let us offer up in Sacrifice to God, every Affection which is contrary to his Will, and not be loth to see it, but rejoyce in the discovery, that we may approve our selves unto him as those that love him with all their Heart, *i. e.* are entirely devoted to do and suffer all things according to his good pleasure, after the example of him, who in the most terrible agony submitted and said, *not mine, but thy will be done*, even Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom with &c.





SERMON XL.

On the Eighteenth Sunday after TRINITY.



EZEKIEL xx. 24.

*Because they had not executed my Judgments,
but had despised my Statutes, and had pol-
luted my Sabbaths, and their Eyes were af-
ter their Fathers Idols.*



HIS Chapter contains an expostulation of God with certain of the Elders of *Israel*, who came to the Prophet *Ezekiel*, in the time of their Captivity, to enquire of him, why God was so displeased with them, and what he would advise them to do to recover his Favour. The answer is, that this was a trifling and frivolous Question. They had no need of a new Revelation to teach them what it was that would obtain the Blessings, or bring down the Judgments of God upon them. They could not be ignorant of the Covenant which he had made with their Ancestors at the first, and which he had caused to be written, and constantly
read

read and preached among them; by which they might learn the things which he required them both to avoid and to observe, and how he would reward their Obedience, and punish their Transgressions. They might farther collect, from the ancient Records of their Nation, many Instances of the judgments and mercies which God exercised towards them, and others upon their account. How he covenanted with them in *Egypt* to rescue them from the slavery under which they groaned, to take them out of the midst of that idolatrous Nation, and plant them in a fruitful Land, and make them a free People, upon condition that he should be their God, and they should be his Servants. To this end he lift up his hand, and made bare his arm, in the divine Judgments which he poured out upon the *Egyptians*, to work their deliverance. But yet these wonderful works, in which God magnified his power to the confusion of all the Magicians and Idols of *Egypt*, could not persuade his People to fulfill their part of the Covenant, which was, to cast away the Idols of that Nation, and to have none other God besides him. This provoked him to threaten that he would leave them there, and suffer them to be Slaves to that People, whose Idols they adored. But in consideration of what he had already done, and the advances he had made towards their deliverance, whereby his name and power came to be much celebrated among the *Egyptians*, that they might not afterwards blaspheme him, as one that had undertaken more than he was able to accomplish, he constrained them to let his people depart from among them, and brought them by a miraculous Passage through the Red Sea, into the borders of *Arabia*, onwards of their Journey to the promised Land.

AND here he gave them a body of Laws, which might distinguish them from the Heathen, to be a peculiar

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peculiar people to himself; and appointed them Sabbaths and Seasons of Rest from their bodily Labour, that they might have leisure to assemble together, and attend to the reading and preaching of these Laws. Nevertheless they proved very untractable Disciples; they profaned the Sabbaths, by doing their own pleasure upon them, and made very slow progress in learning the Will of God; and what they did learn, they made no conscience to observe; but despised the divine Statutes and Judgments, and their Heart went after their Task-masters Idols.

SUCH was the behaviour of *Israel* in *Egypt* and the Wilderness; nor did the felicities of *Canaan* conduce much to the improvement of their Piety. This very Generation, whose Elders came to ask counsel of the Prophet *Ezekiel*, had violated the divine Laws, and polluted themselves with Idols as much as their Forefathers; and now they are in Captivity, receiving the reward of their Impieties, yet they cannot see, without a new Revelation by a Prophet, what it is that has brought their Calamities upon them. Whence we may observe,

I. How strangely wicked Men are apt to be infatuated and blinded with their Impieties, so that they will not acknowledge them to be the cause of their Sufferings.

II. That the natural and necessary cause of publick Calamities is Atheism, or a general neglect and contempt of the divine Majesty.

III. That there is no other way to remove such Calamities, but by restoring the Government of God amongst Men.

AND IF, Wicked Men are so prejudiced in favour of their sinful ways, that they are but seldom, and with great difficulty, brought to acknowledge them to be the meritorious cause of God's Visitations. *Wherefore is all this come upon us?* says idolatrous

idolatrous *Israel* in Captivity; and they ask this of their Prophet, when a succession of Prophets for many Generations had been constantly preaching to them this very Doctrine in my Text, *That if they were not careful to execute Justice and Judgment, if they despised God's Laws, and profaned his Sabbaths, and corrupted his Religion by Heresies and Idolatries, they should be rooted out of the Land of Canaan, and carried into Captivity among the Heathen.* And though *Judah* had seen *Israel* go before them, and actually dissolved and destroyed from being a Nation, for the multitude of their Impieties; yet when it came to their own turn to be carried away to *Babylon*, instead of reflecting on their ways, and seeing that they had trod in the same steps with their Brethren; they ask what they have done, and seem to wonder what it was that had so offended God against them, as to provoke him to cast them out of his sight.

THIS is an inexcusable, an amazing perverseness, that Men who have the divine Warnings continually rung in their Ears, and the punishment of their Sins set before their Face; that Men who daily see and hear how their own Sins are and have been punished in others, should be to seek for a Reason of their Punishments, when it comes to their own turn to suffer them. This, I say, is very amazing; I wish I could call it Strange, in one sense of that word, as it signifies Unusual. But, to the lamentable woe and misfortune of Mankind, it is too much the practice of every Age and Nation under Heaven.

WHENEVER it pleases God to visit a Nation with War, Pestilence, Famine, or some other grievous Judgment, (and he never inflicts any of these Judgments, but upon a Country polluted with some crying Sin) the Men that shall do the Office of the ancient Prophets, in assigning and pointing out such

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such Sins as are the Cause of such Judgments, shall generally meet with the Treatment of the old Prophets, and be accounted as too superstitious, or disordered in their Heads, or dissatisfied with their own Share in the State of Affairs. And they shall not fail to be opposed, as They were, with a contrary Set of Prophets, who will smoothly proclaim Peace from Heaven, when God's Arm is made bare to punish, and the Cause of his Indignation is glaring and obvious.

THIS was the Complaint of old, that when the Hand of Divine Justice was lifted up, the People would not see the Rod, and him who had appointed it; but interpreted all their Calamities as the Effects of meer Chance, or natural Causes. Pestilences and immoderate Drought were ascribed to a particular Constitution of the Air; Wars and Invasions, to the Ambition of neighbouring Princes, who sought to add *Canaan* to the rest of their Dominions. Shipwrecks at Sea were occasioned by Storms and Tempests. All this is very true; but the fatal Error lay here, in resting in these as in the primary Causes, and looking no farther. Which is the Atheism that has always ruined the World; for it excludes God from the Government of it, and consequently provokes him to forsake it, and leave it to the Power of evil Angels to infest it.

BUT this may be something wide of the Matter in hand. The People we are speaking of, did not deny the Dispensations of God: they were sensible of his Judgments; but they were so favourable to their own Manners, as not to see that they had done enough to merit their Sufferings. How then could they reconcile them with the Justice and Goodness of God? Why, they often thought that they suffered for the Iniquities of their Forefathers. They have a Saying among them, *that*

all their Misfortunes receive some Aggravation from the sin of the golden Calf, which their Ancestors made in the Wilderness: And this very Prophet Ezekiel complains of them, that it was commonly said among them in his Days, that the Fathers had eaten sower Grapes, and the Childrens Teeth were set on edge.

Now it is well known that God has reserved to himself the Power of visiting the Iniquities of Parents upon their Children; but then it is of such as hate him, and so add their own Provocations to those of their Fore-fathers. As a wicked Father may avert the Wrath of God, and turn his Judgments into Blessings, if he will turn from the Evil of his former Ways; so the righteous Son of a wicked Father shall not bear his Parent's Iniquity: if he be not Partaker in his Guilt, neither shall he bear any Part of his Punishment. This is the Divine Sentence by our Prophet, ch. xviii. and it is most clearly and incontestably verified in the publick Face of Things here upon Earth. One Generation of Men is happy, and another calamitous, in proportion to the State of true Religion, and the Fear of God among them; as we shall see more at large under my

II^d Head, which is this, THAT the natural and necessary Cause of publick Calamities is Atheism, or a general Neglect and Contempt of the Divine Majesty. The Truth of which has been so fully experienced, that none but very ignorant, or very perverse and froward People will dare to deny it. Even those Men who have been so weak, as in their Practice to walk contrary to God, and have flattered themselves that they should find their Pleasure or Profit in those Things which he has forbidden them, yet in their serious Discourses they have rarely justified such Practices; few of them have been hardy enough to deliver any
 Thing

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Thing by Word or Writing, as a Rule of human Actions, but what is built upon this Foundation, that *God governs the World, and that he will render to every Man according to his Works.* How few are there, among the Men of abandoned Conscience, who would willingly have the World to act as they do? or care to write a Book of their own Morals, and recommend it to the Imitation of Mankind? On the contrary, how many wicked Parents have laid their most serious Commands, at the close of Life, upon their Children, to fear God and keep his Commandments? How many Malefactors have earnestly warned others to shun those Ways, which have brought them to Destruction? and confest in the Sense, and almost in the Words of my Text, that if they had but acted the honest Part, and kept the Sabbath, and refrained from the Idols of their own Imagination, it had been happy for them? And this bids fair for a Proof of the Sense of Mankind, *that our Calamities are owing to our want of the Fear of God.*

THERE are, I confess, a world of People, who are deceived by the Riches of wicked Men, and the Pleasures they take, and the Honours and Respects which are paid them, so far as to pronounce them happy. But that is more than these Men will say of themselves, if they have any Grains of sound Understanding, and if they have not, then they are wretched in this respect, that they want the Faculty of judging what real Happiness is: And this very Mask and Vizard of Happiness is commonly pluckt off by the Hand of Providence in a little time, and the Hypocrite exposed in his genuine Colours, as all serious Observers can testify: *For the Triumph and Joy of the wicked, says Zophar, Job xx. 5. is but for a Moment, and the Hypocrite's Hope shall perish, and though for a time he flourishes like a green Bay-tree,*

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as the Psalmist speaks, xxxvii. 35; yet his End is to be cut off at the last; and his Memory will be so obliterated, that the Place of his Habitation shall know him no more. *His Money*, says the Prophet, *Hag. i. 6. is put into a Bag that hath holes*; it is often squandered and consumed in an unaccountable manner.

THE like may be said of any Kingdom or Nation, whose Sins are predominant, and little or no Power of Religion to be seen among them. They may prosper for a while in the height of their Provocations. It is agreeable to God's Method of calling such People to Repentance, to give them time and space for it. He sends his Ministers to shew them the Evil of their Ways, and to denounce his Judgments against them, if they will not turn and repent: And if they prove deaf to his Warnings, he begins to let some few Arrows of his Displeasure fly among them, to convince them that he is in good earnest, and that he is able to execute what he threatens. But if these lighter Afflictions work not the intended Reformation, then he pours out the Vials of his heavy and consuming Judgments, Pestilence, Famine, Sword, and the like, to root out incorrigible Sinners, and cast them out of his Sight. This has been God's Method with many once powerful Empires and Kingdoms, which have been gradually broken, and at last abolished and reduced to nothing, because they have degenerated from their first Piety and Virtue, and the Cry of their Sins has prevailed against that of their Prayers, and they have stood out incorrigible against all God's Dispensations both of Mercy and Judgment, which he has used to reclaim them.

For as I noted in the III^d Place, THERE is no other way to remove such Calamities, but by putting away the Sins which occasioned them,
and

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and restoring the Government of God among Men.

THIS happy Change of Manners, and seasonable Return to Obedience, has rescued many a grievous Sinner as a Brand out of the Fire, and lengthened his Days, when the Sword of Divine Vengeance was just ready to cut him off, and preserved him a Name and Posterity upon Earth, and delivered him from having his Portion with Hypocrites, to be numbered with the Children of God.

THE Instances of this Salvation are very many: We read it in the Lives of those Men, who setting out and going far in the broad Ways of Destruction, have happily been stopt by some special Providence, *and turned from Darkneſs to Light, and from the Power of Sin and Satan unto God.* And they have afterwards lived in the constant Sense and Acknowledgment of such their Conversion, and kissed the Rod which corrected them, and adored him who appointed it, and confessed, *that it was of the Lord's Mercies that they were not utterly consumed.*

THE like Conversions have changed the Fate and reversed the Doom of whole Kingdoms and Nations, and removed the Judgments which were ready to consume them. The History of *Israel* alone affords many Instances of these Dispensations. When their Sins against God have brought them very low, and subjected them to the Yoke of the Heathen round about them; yet by confessing their Iniquities, and putting away the strange Gods from among them, and serving the Lord, they have been either enabled, under the greatest Disadvantages, to overcome their Enemies, or else have found such Favour in their Eyes, that they have turned that Power which carried them into Captivity, to be the Means of their Restoration.

Even the Prisons and Guards of the *Babylonians* could not detain them, when the humbled Captives were no longer Slaves to Idols; when they renewed their Vows of Obedience to their God in *Sion*, and sent their Hearts to *Jerusalem*, God caused all those that had led them away captive, to pity them, and work their Deliverance, and help them to rebuild that City and Temple, which they had formerly demolished and laid in Ruines.

ANOTHER obvious Instance of a blessed Change which People's turning to God has made in their Affairs, is that of the *Ninevites*, who hearing by the Preaching of *Jonah*, that they were doomed to Destruction in forty days time, had the Grace to believe it, and humbled themselves in the Dust, and cried mightily unto God to turn away from the Fierceness of his Wrath, and spare them; by which Humiliation they obtained Deliverance, and prevented the Execution of the threatened Judgment.

AND we cannot doubt (since the best Histories assure us) that many other Cities and People, who were destitute of the Knowledge of the true God, yet seeking in their Dangers to atone him according to the best of their Understanding, and repairing those Breaches which wicked Men had made in their Ordinances of Piety and Justice, have by such their serious Endeavours obtained a merciful Deliverance from the Destruction which was breaking in upon them, and have raised their sinking Constitution, and animated it with new Life and Vigour for a longer Continuance.

UPON the whole, it is undeniably evident that God governs the World, and is the Dispenser of Prosperity and Adversity to the Inhabitants of it. For which end, all things which we call second Causes, obey him, and work together for our Comfort or Affliction, according as he in his Justice sees

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sees fit to direct them. From whence we must conclude,

I. **THAT** it is our best Policy to secure to our selves the love and favour of God, which we can no otherways obtain but by keeping his Commandments. For such our Obedience he has made the condition of his Mercies and Loving-kindness towards us; and from the beginning of the World to this day, has verified this rule, That Righteousness exalteth a Nation, but that a Land defiled with Prophaneness and Immorality is cursed, and nigh to Destruction. All Histories and Annals of former times proclaim this truth, and teach us to know our good or bad circumstances, as certainly as if we had a thousand Prophets sent to us with immediate Revelations. For they show us, by a multitude of examples, *that God has always honoured those that honour him, and cover'd those who despise him with shame and confusion of Face.*

II. We conclude from what has been said, that it is our wisest way to consider Calamities, especially such as are plainly providential, as tokens of God's displeasure, and his visitations of our sins. For by Sin it was that Death first entred into the World, and all Calamities are part of the Empire and Dominion of this Death: and the more we sin, the more obnoxious we render ourselves to this Dominion. Every offence against God, adds weight to the load of our misfortunes. It is our wisdom therefore, to abstain as much as may be, from such Offences. And sure it is enough to deterr us from them, when we consider *Death as the wages of Sin.* When we seriously lay it to Heart how much our Sins have separated us from God, the fountain of all Happiness, this should make us careful to heal the separation, by drawing nigh unto him in holy Meditations and Prayers, by confessing and honouring him before men, and by

yielding the Obedience of dutiful Children to all his Commandments. For

Lastly, NOTHING else can appease God's Wrath, and procure the removal of any Judgment which is inflicted on us. The Prophets of *Israel* were wont to assure their People, that it was in vain for them to seek redress of their grievances any other ways, so long as they suffered Sin to have the dominion over them. For this it was that God afflicted them, and called them to Repentance, and if they continued impenitent, his Hand would be stretched out still to smite them till they turned to him.

HE had for many Ages sent his Prophets among them, and reprov'd them for their gross corruption of his Religion and Laws. He had upbraided them with their partial decisions in their Courts of Judicature, and how they perverted Truth and Justice by their shameful Bribery; and how they despised the Assemblies of his Worship, and regarded his Sabbaths no more than common days; but did whatsoever seemed good in their own eyes. For these things he threatned to remove them out of his sight, and scatter them among the Heathen; which Threatning, after many years Patience and tryal of them to no purpose, he was compell'd by their incorrigibleness to execute upon them.

THESE things are written for our instruction; let no man think that this was a particular case, or that Christians have more indulgence from God than the Jews, to transgress the Laws of Truth and Righteousness. Such Laws are immutable, and the same unchangeable God enjoyns them upon us, and exacts our Obedience to them. He has the same vials to pour out upon our defiled Land, and we have the like enjoyments, lives, estates, and liberties to lose by his just Visitations.

LET

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LET us not then flatter ourselves, that Prosperity will dwell in our guilty Habitations, if we go on to banish Religion and Virtue, Truth and Justice from amongst us. Neither let us cast away our portion of good things in this life, by such doings as will at the same time bereave us of the comfort of God's favour and a good Conscience.

BUT we have a *Canaan* too, and a *Jerusalem*, not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens: Into which *nothing can enter that defileth, or worketh Abomination, or maketh a lye*. For it is the peculiar Kingdom of the God of Truth and Holiness. Blessed are all they that shall be found to resemble him in these Attributes; for such he will own for his elect and beloved Children, and gather them into his celestial Family, to the Society of his holy ones, who are sanctified and redeemed by the Blood of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom &c.



SERMON



SERMON XLI.

On the Nineteenth Sunday after TRINITY.



DAN. iii. 16, 17, 18.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the King: O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery Furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O King. But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy Gods, nor worship the Golden Image which thou hast set up.

UCH was the courageous Answer of three noble Captives of the Tribe of Judah, to their redoubted Conqueror the King of Babylon, when with rage and fury he called them before him, to answer to an accusation brought against them, that they refused to fall down and worship a golden Image which he had lately erected, in the eighteenth year of his reign, as the LXX Interpreters affirm,

affirm, and which he had commanded all People of his Dominions, Natives and Foreigners, to adore as a Deity, upon pain of suffering death by fire, the punishment which Idolaters have commonly inflicted upon those who could not comply with their Image-worship.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR was the more impatient to be refused by these three men, because he had done them the favour to select them out of all the Captives of *Jewry*, to be educated in his own Court, under his own eye and notice, and had conversed often with them, and advanced them to high Offices in the Province of *Babylon*. He resented it most heinously that these three men alone should disobey his Edict, while the Princes and People of all other Nations and Languages, whom he had carried Captive to *Babylon*, fell down upon their knees at the appointed times, and performed their devotions very punctually. Among whom these Dissenters might very probably see crowds of their own Countrymen, who being now Bond-slaves in *Babylon* for their Domestick Idolatry, were satisfying the divine Vengeance, threatned to them of old on that account, that *they should serve dumb Idols in a strange Land*. Deut. iv. 28.

It is a question properly put upon this Occasion, how it comes to pass that we hear nothing of *Daniel* in this business, and by what good fortune he could escape this fiery Tryal. Most certain it is, that where-ever he was, he continued faithful to his God, and constant to his former character. He that afterwards signalized his Piety, by persevering in it till he was thrown to the Lions, would not certainly have been diverted from it by the menaces of a fiery Furnace. The answer of *Rabbi Aben Ezra* to this Question is this. ‘The *Chaldeans*, says he, who accused the other three, durst

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durst not presume to accuse *Daniel*, in consideration of his superlative dignity, and the honour which the King himself had formerly done him, prostrating himself before him, and perfuming him with an Oblation of sweet Odours, in devotion to the excellent Spirit which was in him. This is improved by St. *Chrysostom* with a fine strain of Wit and Piety. 'The Providence of God, says he, in much wisdom ordered it, that *Daniel* should not accompany the other three in the Furnace. The King had named him *Belteshazzar*, by the name of his God. And to the virtue of that name the *Chaldeans* would have imputed this deliverance from the fire. His absence disarm'd them of this argument, and left them under the undeniable conviction, that this deliverance was wrought by the God of *Israel*.

BUT to come to a more particular discussion of the matter before us. In this great event we may see,

I. THE bold Impiety of *Nebuchadnezzar* in erecting this Idol, and using means as he did to compel all People, especially his Jewish Captives, to fall down and worship it.

II. THE exemplary courage and fidelity of these men, in withstanding the impetuous passion of the King, and suffering all the effects of his rage and fury, rather than yield to the impiety of worshiping his Idol.

III. THE happy issue of their Constancy, and triumph of their Faith in this conflict.

And Iſt, As to the Idol itself, though the Sacred Text says nothing of the shape of it, yet I think it is not doubted but that it was made in the figure of a man: some think it was intended for *Belus*, the Founder of the *Babylonian* Royal Family, others for *Nabopolassar*, this King's Father; but a third Opinion is, that it was a model of

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of that Image which *Nebuchadnezzar* had seen in his dream, in the foregoing Chapter, which he might take to be the Genius of his Kingdom, and which therefore he might hope to render propitious to him and his Affairs, by dedicating to him this magnificent Statue, and through it offering to him Divine Honours and Adorations.

THIS indeed was agreeable enough to the Theology of the ancient *Gentiles*, who thus venerated their peculiar and tutelar Deities. But it was more unpardonable in this King than in others, by reason of the long Commerce which he had with the *Jews*, which makes it impossible to conceive that he could be ignorant of this first and greatest Article of their Religion, *That there was but one God, and that he was to be worshipped in a spiritual way, without any material Resemblance*. It was impossible for this King, who was God's instrument in destroying *Jerusalem*, and carrying away the *Jews* Captive, not to have heard, that these Calamities befel them on account of their forsaking the spiritual worship of God, and corrupting their Religion with Idolatries. He knew some of their Prophets, particularly *Jeremiah*, for whom he had a special regard, and gave charge concerning him to *Nebuzaradan* Captain of his Guard, at the spoiling of *Jerusalem*, saying, *Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm, but treat him in every thing as he shall require.* Jer. xxxix. 12. He must needs know how this Prophet declaim'd against Idols in general, not only those of his own People, but of all the Nations round about them, not sparing the Idols of *Babylon* among the rest. He was well acquainted with *Daniel* and these three men, whom he had appointed to be bred up in his Court, and to be fitted for the high Offices of his Kingdom, to which he quickly preferred them. He had lately

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made tryal of *Daniel's* true Religion and Wisdom, in declaring and explaining to him a Dream, which none of his Magicians nor Astrologers were able to find out; and freely acknowledges to him upon this occasion; *of a truth, says he, your God is a God of Gods and Lord of Kings, and a Revealer of Secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this Secret.*

Now since *Nebuchadnezzar* had such Occasions to know the true God, and had received such favours from him, it might have been justly expected that he should have renounced the errors of his Fathers, and have embraced the worship of that God whom he owned to be much superior to all others. But instead of this, to add new Idols to the old ones, was a great aggravation of his Sin. And it was still more sinful in him, to compel men, by the terrors of a fiery Furnace, to prostitute their Sense and Reason and good Conscience to his monstrous Image.

I will not now stand to enquire how far it may be lawful to enforce the profession even of true Religion by Temporal Penalties. There is a Zeal for God, which his own word approves of in Magistrates and Ministers; and there is a Zeal without knowledge, which runs out into a criminal Persecution, for which *St. Paul* says *that he obtained mercy, because he acted ignorantly, 1 Tim. i. 13.* But surely *Nebuchadnezzar* could not plead this excuse. He must be well acquainted, (for the reasons aforesaid) with the Religion of these men; he had the greatest Obligations to their God, and was bound to them by the laws of Hospitality, and by the faithful service which we may justly suppose they rendered him in their respective Stations. In all civil cases they honoured and obeyed him as their King, only they could not worship his Gods. And therefore for him, who knew all this, to attempt to put such a force upon
4 their

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their pure Consciences, was the height of impiety and cruelty mixed together.

II. LET us now turn to the contemplation of the exemplary courage and fidelity of these Men, who withstood the impetuous passion of the King, and chose to suffer all the effects of his Rage and Fury, rather than yield to the Impiety of worshipping his Idol. To behold on the one hand a Fire kindled, on purpose to consume those who would not adore this Image; and on the other hand, an inexorable King transported with furious zeal for his Religion, threatening their denial with immediate Punishment, and ready to see Execution done with his own Eyes; to see their own poor number of three who refused, condemned by the many thousands about them who complied; to reflect upon the favours they had received from the King, how highly he had exalted them above his native Subjects, how happily they might live under him still for many Years, could they but submit to bow the Knee at his Command; these were all very shocking Considerations, which would have confounded the generality of Men, and have induced them, if not to prostrate themselves before the Idol, yet at least to have fallen down before the King, and have craved time of him for farther deliberation, about a matter of so great concern to them. But instead of flying to the refuge of affrighted, confounded Men, they constantly and bravely end the Matter upon the spot, in a very short and clear Speech, *O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this Matter, i. e.* ‘ We do not want time to deliberate and frame a soft and artful answer to this Demand. It is well known to you and all the World that we worship but one God, and that without any material or sensible representation of him. To his heavenly will and disposal we resign our selves; if he pleases, he can and will deliver

'liver us from this Fire which you have prepared
'to consume us. But if he shall suffer it to de-
'vour us, we yield to it, rather than serve your
'Gods, or worship this Image which you have
'set up.'

THIS was a brave resolute Answer; and well
suited to the Occasion. In other cases Kings ought
to be answered with great Respect and Reverence,
and none more conformable to such civil respects
than *Daniel* and his Fellows, as we learn from this
very Book. But when the royal command is to dis-
honour God, by giving his glory to Idols, then
we must retreat under the Protection of the King
of Kings, and bravely let earthly Potentates
know, that nothing which they can do for us or
against us, shall be able to seduce us from the Ser-
vice of our supreme Master. *Whether he will deliver
us or not*, said these Martyrs, *be it known to you; that
we will not worship your Gods.*

THIS is a plain argument that their hopes were
extended beyond this Life: for had they thought
the fiery Furnace could have put an end to their
Being, and that there should nothing have remain-
ed of them for God to reward or punish in ano-
ther State, I am of opinion they would have bow-
ed to this Image, rather than have burned for it.
For however some affirm that Truth is so much more
beautiful and con-natural to the Soul of Man than
Falschhood, that a wise Man would prefer it even
for its own sake, though nothing was to be expect-
ed after this Life; yet if it were to be vindicated with
the utter extinction of the whole Man, and that on
the contrary his receding from it would prolong
his Existence and his Happiness, I am apt to think
that it would in such case become an allowed rule
of Wisdom, to recede from the Truth when it could
not be held without suffering the loss of Soul and
Body for the sake of it. But to speak more intel-
ligibly;

ligibly, and agreeably to the divine OEconomy; we are very sure that God never did nor can impose that thing as a Duty upon us, in the performance of which we shall not find our interest and gain to be far greater than our loss. Which if it cannot be made good to us in this Life, as it cannot possibly be, after life it self is taken away, then a reward must remain for us in that which is to come.

AND this was certainly the motive why these Martyrs of the true God did so cheerfully surrender their Bodies to the Flames, submitting themselves to him, to live or die, as he saw most conducive to his own Glory; firmly believing that if the fire dissolved their Bodies, their Souls should pass into his more immediate Presence, and be made Partakers of his immortal Felicities; and that he would reproduce their bodies again in the reign of the *Messiah*; for St. *Paul* numbers them among such Believers, *Heb. xi.* and says that by virtue of this Faith, *they quenched the violence of the Fire, i. e.* they had such lively, sure, and present views of God and his Kingdom, with which their Spirits were so much exalted, that they could have dissolved in the Flames with little or no sense of Pain, for the greatness of the Joys which flowed in upon them. ' In this
' sacred conflict, says *Zeno Verouensis*, their eyes
' were so fixed upon God, that they saw not the
' Fire, and so intent upon the Crown of Martyr-
' dom, that they forgot the pains of Death: Thus
' being raised above the mounting Flames, and
' struggling Balls of Fire, they gave the Spectators
' a glorious Demonstration, that the Souls of Holy
' Men are of greater Strength and Fortitude, than
' the most potent Tyrants upon Earth, with all
' their Instruments of Death about them.'

I believe I need not say much to persuade those who have a competent knowledge of the Suffer-

ings of Holy Martyrs, that many of them have given the best Evidence, that the consolations of God have far exceeded the torments of Men in their greatest Extremities. I shall produce but one instance to this purpose, a passage of undoubted Credit. *Socr. Hist. Eccl. B. 3. C. 19.* Where we read that 'When the Emperor Julian persecuted Christians in the fourth Century, amongst others he caused grievous tortures to be inflicted upon the Body of a young Man, whose name was *Theodorus*, who was so horribly flayed and mangled by the Executioner, that it was thought he would never outlive it. However it pleased God in a wonderful manner to restore him. *Ruffinus* who wrote an Ecclesiastical History says, 'That a long time after he asked this *Theodorus* in Conversation, how acute his Pain was in the time of his Suffering; and that his answer was, that it was very light and short; for that while he was upon the Rack, a young Man stood by him, who wiped off the Sweat caused by his Agony, and mightily cheered his Spirits, so that he felt much more pleasure than pain all the time of his Torture.'

THIS brings us to the third and last thing I proposed, viz. to observe the happy Issue of these Men's Constancy, and the triumph of their Faith in this conflict. The enraged King had power to throw them into the Fire, but he had no power to make the Fire burn them. He saw his Executioners cast them bound into the midst of the overheated Furnace, and sat him down at a distance, meaning to feed his Eyes with a pleasing Vengeance; but when he thought he should have seen them speedily flame out, and then fall into Ashes, he saw, to his amazement, a fourth Man come to them, who loosed their Bonds, set them upon their Feet, and went before them, all four of them walking

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walking in the midst of the Fire, and singing Praises to God, without receiving any hurt. The King, when he called to his Counsellors upon this occasion, told them, *that the Form of the fourth Man was like the Son of God.* By this he might mean that he appeared to be a very august, majestick Person; a god-like Man, as we would say. This is as much as the Expression sometimes imports. But because he could not think that a Man of Flesh and Blood could enter there, and preserve the Sufferers in such a miraculous manner, he must rather mean that it was some Divine Being sent from Heaven for this purpose. Now the Holy Angels are in sacred Writ often called *the Sons of God*; and as to their Guardianship of good Men, it was universally believed by the People of old Times, agreeably to that of the Psalmist, xxxiv. *The Angel of the Lord tarrieth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.* And in that part of this History, which is placed among the apocryphal Writings, because not found in the *Hebrew*; it is said, ver. 25. 'That the Angel of the Lord came down into the Oven, together with *Azarias* and his Fellows, and smote the Flame of the Fire out of the Oven; and made the midst of the Furnace as it had been a moist whistling Wind, so that the Fire touched them not at all, neither hurt nor troubled them.' Which Words give us some Idea how the Heat was restrained from burning them; it was all turned to the out-sides, so that it slew those that approached the Mouth of it, while it hurt not these Men who were within.

BUT we must not forget here, that several of the antient Christian Fathers were of opinion, that this Person who came to the Holy Martyrs and delivered them from the Fire, was most properly and truly the Son of God, the second Per-

son in the blessed Trinity. And this was so generally the Persuasion of those Times, that in the Anthem which they sung in the Church on *Easter-day*, this was one Versicle, *He that delivered the three Children out of the fiery Furnace, is risen from the Grave.*

To this it will be objected, that it is not credible *Nebuchadnezzar* knew any thing of this Son of God, so as to be able to say, that this Person was like him: And we may readily allow that he did not: and yet this Objection does not at all overthrow our Hypothesis. For the King might mean in general, that he seemed to be some Divine Person; and this Person might be the particular and only Son of God; who in all probability appeared upon Earth in human Shape upon some Occasions, long before his Incarnation. And since many of the wisest and best of the Ancients were persuaded that he appeared now, we ought not to explode their Opinion, except we had some stronger Objection against it.

LET us conclude, as these holy Men concluded, with rendring and reserving to the most High, the Honour which is peculiarly due to his Divine Majesty, always *blessing, praising and magnifying him above all his Works.* I confess the Hymn which I allude to, stands among our apocryphal Scriptures; but it is so devout and pious, that it has always been thought to deserve a place in the Service, not only of our present, but of the most antient Church. Some perhaps may think that it wants Spirit, and is not pertinent to the Occasion; but *St. Chrysostom* has taken the pains to set it in a due light, and to shew the just Propriety of every Part of it. That learned and eloquent Father observes, that it was very proper for these holy Men to teach the *Chaldeans*, upon this occasion, to distinguish accurately between the Creator and

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and the Creatures: because there is scarce any thing from the highest Angel to the lowest Reptile, which the *Gentiles* had not idolized and venerated with Divine Worship. While then they so particularly enumerate the Creatures, and summon them all to magnify and adore one God, they intimate hereby the Unity of the Divine Nature, and the Dependence which his Creatures have upon him, and that he is not to be circumscribed in any Place, or represented by any Figure. And thus much for the general Design of this Anthem. I cannot at present attend the holy Father in descanting upon all the Branches of it. But two Points I shall mention for a taste of the Propriety of the whole. When these Confessors call upon the Fire and Heat to bless the Lord, they admonish the *Chaldeans*, who worshipped the Fire as a Deity, to take Notice how effectually in this present case, it had been restrained and over-ruled by the God of *Israel*. And when they call upon themselves, by their first Names of *Ananias*, *Azarias*, and *Misael*, to praise the Lord, they do hereby disclaim all Power in themselves to have wrought this wonderful Deliverance, and prevent the superstitious Spectators from deifying them, or thinking of them more highly than they ought to think.

LET us endeavour to be thus humbly and dutifully affected towards the Lord our God, arrogating nothing of his Glory to our selves, nor presuming to ascribe it to other of the Creatures; but ever giving him the Honour due unto his Name, and worshipping him with an holy Worship; that so we may enjoy the Salvation of his blessed Son, and be rescued by him from the Fire of eternal Punishment in the World to come. To him with the Father and the Holy Ghost &c.



SERMON XLII.

On the Twentieth Sunday after TRINITY.



JOEL ii. 12; 13.

Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.— And rent your Heart, and not your Garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to Anger, and of great Kindness, and repenteth him of the Evil.



THIS Prophecy having no Date at the Beginning, nor Name of any reigning Prince, as others commonly have, to denote the Time when it was first published, we are left to guess when it was that the Author of it lived. St. Jerom thinks he was cotemporary with the preceding Prophet Hosea, who prophesied in the Days of Uzziab, Jotham, Abaz, and Hezekiab, Kings of Judah, and under Jeroboam, the second of that name, King
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of *Israel*; grounding his Opinion, I suppose, on a Rule of the *Jewish* Doctors, though not always true, That when the Time of a Prophet is not expressed, he is to be accounted of the same age with the Prophet placed next before him. This is certain, that he lived between the Reign of *Je-hoshaphat* King of *Judah*, and the Destruction of the first Temple, as may be collected from Circumstances which he mentions of them.

THE historical part of his Prophecy contains a Narrative of a very grievous Calamity under which the Land of *Judea* groaned at the time of his writing it. So very strange and grievous, as had never been known or heard of in former times, and such as their own Posterity would be astonished at, when they should be told of it. The short of the Account is this, That such vast swarms of Locusts had overspread them, as had quite destroyed, not only the Fruits of the Earth, but even the very Trees and Herbs of the Field, and by that means had occasioned a consuming Famine and Pestilence among the People. These Locusts the Prophet speaks of in such military Terms, and represents them like such a formidable Army, that it has induced several learned Men to think, that they are put by a Figure to denote real Armies of *Egyptians*, *Assyrians*, *Babylonians*, or other Adversaries of the *Jews*, who about this time, they think, invaded them, and spoiled their Country. But we read of no such general Depredations made by any of these People, in those Books of the Kings, which contain the Records of their military Affairs, and which could fall within that Period of Time wherein this Prophecy must be written: And therefore the prevailing, and I think more probable Opinion is, that we are to understand the Locust, Canker-worm, Palmer-worm, and Caterpillar, spoken of ch. i. ver. 4. in a literal

Sense; and that the military Terms which are used, may by the Authority of parallel Scriptures well be applied to them. This we shall best see in an Examination of the Particulars.

1st then, in ch. i. ver. 6. THE Prophet tells them, *That a Nation is come up upon their Land, strong and without number, whose Teeth are the Teeth of a Lion.* Now the Word *Nation*, or *People*, though most fitly applied to Men, is also by the best Authors used sometimes in speaking of irrational Creatures; for which see *Prov. xxx. 25.* whence R. David Kimchi observes, that any Congregation or Multitude of living Creatures, may be styled *Goi*, a *Nation*. These Locusts are here so named, with the Epithets of *strong* and *innumerable* affixt to them. What they want in strength, is made up in their multitude. The comparison of their Teeth to those of a Lion, is likewise used *Rev. ix. 8.* and serves to intimate what incredible Mischief their little Teeth can do; gnawing to pieces not only green tender Things, but even the Doors of Houses, as *Pliny* observes. And here the Prophet complains, that they peeled off the Barks of Trees, and stript the Branches of their natural Covering.

2^{dly}, It is a most common Practice in War, to lay Countries waste by burning them. And of this our Prophet complains in this Calamity, ch. i. ver. 19. *That the Fire had devoured the Pastures of the Wilderness, and the Flame burnt up all the Trees of the Field.* Now the forementioned *Pliny* affirms of these Locusts, that their Touch is so venomous as to burn or parch things; they do not only lick up the Product of the Field before them, like that devouring Element, but like it too, they leave a horrid Brownness behind them. Though this may allude to a great Drought and Scarcity of Rain, which often accompanies the swarming of these Vermin, and of which the following Verse

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is most naturally to be interpreted: *The Beasts of the Field do cry, says he; for the Rivers of Water are dried up; and the fire (or fiery heat) hath devoured the Pastures of the Wilderness.*

3dly, **THAT** Saying of this Prophet, chap. ii. ver. 4. *The appearance of them is as the appearance of Horses, and as Horsemen so shall they run,* may well be applied to Locusts, as it is again *Rev. ix. 7. Theodoret,* in his Comment on this Verse of *Joel*, says, that whoever shall accurately consider the head of a Locust, will find it very much to resemble that of a Horse. And the *Arabians*, who are well acquainted with these Creatures, as being often infested by them, observe the same of them. And it is an Observation which has scarcely escaped any Naturalist who has wrote of them. Then in the next clause they are pertinently compared to Horsemen in battel, with regard to their undaunted speed and boldness in their progress. And this is a convincing Argument to many, that the words are properly to be understood of Locusts; for human Armies have real Horsemen, but these are only said to be like them.

4thly, **THE** Prophet says, in the next verse, *that by their leaping they shall make a noise like Chariots on the tops of Mountains, like a flame of Fire in stubble, like a strong People set in battel-array.* All these comparisons are proper to express the horrid noise which the swarms of innumerable Locusts here spoken of, make in their approach to any Country, and thereby strike terror into the People. *Remigius* reports, from those whose territories have been infested by them, that their noise has been heard at six miles distance. But it may suffice, for illustrating these words, to add those, *Rev. ix. 9.* where it is said of the Locusts there spoken of, *that the sound of their Wings was like the sound of Chariots, of many Horses running to battel.*
The

The joyning of these two places together shews, that this was a proper and usually received comparison. And this is understood of the noise made by their leaping and flying, as that of a *flame among stubble* is of their chewing or eating any thing.

scilicet, THE Order and Rule which they keep in their progress, is properly resembled to *strong People set in battel-array*, i. e. to well-disciplined Soldiers, who in marching and fighting keep their Ranks and maintain their Stations. That Locusts were of old known to do this, appears from *Prov. xxx. 27. The Locusts*, says he, *have no King, yet they all go forth by their bands*; as in battel-array, guided by one alarm; so the *LXX* expresses it. *St. Jerom, Cyril, and Theodoret*, who lived in the Countreys where swarms of these Creatures were often seen, affirm, that they keep as constant in their places when they fly, as the square stones in a checquer'd Pavement, not suffering themselves by any means to be put out of them. The *Arabian Writers* likewise observe, how they frame themselves into a body, like an Army, in which while the Leader moves, the rest all move; and when he settles, the rest all settle together. So that they seem to be as observant of Military discipline as the best trained Soldiers; which justifies the comparison here used of them.

THE same Idea and Resemblance is continued in the three following verses: *They shall run*, says *Joel*; *like mighty men, they shall climb the wall like men of war, and shall march every one in his way, they shall not break their Ranks. Neither shall one thrust another, they shall walk every one in his path; and when they fall upon the Sword, they shall not be wounded. They shall run to and fro in the City; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the Houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a Thief.*

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ALL this may serve to shew what I proposed, that as the Prophet begins with complaining that the Locusts had eaten up the Land, so he means them all along; and the military Phrases which he uses, are very applicable to them, and very proper to set forth their dexterity, boldness, and resolution to do mischief.

AND how great mischief they wrought in *Judea*, at the time of this invasion here spoken of, I have in some measure explained, as I went along with the description of their properties: But to declare this more fully, I shall review two or three passages of the Prophet to this purpose.

And 1st, HE complains, that the Fields, Vineyards, and Olive-yards were so consumed by this Vermin, that the destruction was followed by a grievous Famine, which he represents in these words: *The Meat-offering and Drink-offering is cut off from the House of the Lord: the Priests, the Lord's Ministers, mourn.* The Corn and the Vines being destroyed by Worms and Locusts, caused a dearth of Wheat-flour and Wine, and that so extreme, that there was not to be had of them enough to serve for the Sacrifice of Meat-offering, and Drink-offering, appointed in the Law to be offered for the sins of the People. This was a just ground of general sorrow, but more especially to the Priests, as well for the Zeal which they might be supposed to have for the service of God, which could not regularly be performed without these things, as also that by reason hereof they were deprived of all the sustenance which God had allotted them among the rest of the Tribes: and so were doom'd to famish, while these Offerings were cut off from the House of the Lord.

2^{dly}, HE complains, that the Seed or Grain sown in the ground, in hopes of a better Harvest to repair this Destruction, perished under the clods
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and came to nothing, chap. i. 17. So that by reason of what they already saw and felt, and what they dreadfully apprehended farther, their Villages were become desolate, their Granaries neglected, their Barns run to ruin, as seeming to be of no use to them, as neither having nor being likely to have any thing to put into them. The reason why the seed came to be marred, was either the great drought and want of rain, before hinted at, which so wither'd and shrunk it up, that it turned all to husk, and had no virtue or moisture left to produce a blade; or else it was so poisoned by the froth which the Locusts left every where behind them, that it came to nothing.

3dly, HE complains that *the herds of Cattle had no pasture, that the flocks of Sheep were become desolate, that the flame had burnt up all the trees of the field; that the rivers and all waters were so dried up, that the Cattle had nothing to drink: that the Land before this vermin was like the Garden of Eden; but all behind them was become a desolate Wilderness, and nothing had escaped them. That they did not only swarm in the Fields, but in Cities too, got over the walls, upon the tops of Houses, and entered in at the windows: that it was in vain to oppose them with any weapon; when they fall upon the Sword, says he, they shall not be wounded; they are so light and nimble, that it cannot hurt them.*

ALL these things laid together, set forth the universal Calamity and Destruction which was caused by the invasion of these Locusts. The Prophet represents it as so horrible, that he makes all nature to be shockt at it, chap. ii. ver. 10. *Before them, says he, shall the Earth quake, the Heavens shall tremble, the Sun and the Moon shall be dark, and the Stars shall withdraw their shining.* St. Jerom upon these words, tells us they are spoken by way of

of Hyperbole; not that there is a power in Locusts to move the Heavens and shake the Earth; but that those who labour under this Calamity, are so terrified with it, that Heaven and Earth seem to them to be confounded and thrown out of their places; and as for the lights of Heaven, they may well be supposed to be darkened by the swarms of these Locusts, as it happened when they were sent one of the Plagues of *Egypt*. As for the trembling and anxiety of the People upon this occasion, the Prophet had before exprest it, ver. 6. *that all Faces should gather blackness*; words very significant, as well of the inward sadness of their Hearts, as of the outward melancholick face of things about them.

NOW the efficient and moving cause of these Creatures, which brought them upon the Land of *Jewry*, was the Wrath of God, who calls them his great Army, who sent them as one of his fore Judgments upon *Pharaoh*, as I just now noted; and threatned to send them upon his own People, in case they provoked him with their Sins.

AND therefore their Sins were the meritorious cause of this dreadful Visitation; and the way to remove it, was to repent of them, by open Confession and Acknowledgment of them, by a deep Humiliation and Sorrow for them, and by utterly renouncing and forsaking them. This is the great reason of the Prophet's discourse, and the main point which he pursues through it. To this he gives out repeated Summons, both particular and general; and very properly begins with that sort of men, who debauching upon the plentiful encrease of the Earth, provoke God to destroy it by unseasonable Weather and noxious Vermin. *Awake ye Drunkards, says he, and weep, and bowl all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it is cut off from your mouth, from those mouths*
which

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which so vilely abused it. 2dly, To the men of Estates; and those under them, who had the dressing and cultivating of the Fields and Vineyards; he tells them their wasted fields reproved their wicked lives. *Be ashamed, O ye Husband-men; howl O ye Vine-dressers, for the Wheat and for the Barley, because the Harvest of the Field is perished.* 3dly, He bids the Officers of Religion look at the failure of their Sacrifices; and lament their own unworthiness; whereby they had provoked God to impoverish them. *Gird yourselves and lament, ye Priests; howl, ye Ministers of the Altar; come, lye all night in Sackcloth, ye Ministers of my God; for the Meat-offering and the Drink-offering is withholden from the house of your God.*

IN the next place he directs them how to practise their Repentance, both as to publick Expression, and inward Affection. *Blow the Trumpet in Zion, sanctifie a Fast, call a solemn Assembly; gather the People, sanctifie the Congregation, assemble the Elders, gather the Children and those that suck the Breasts: let the Bridegroom go forth of his Chamber, and the Bride out of her Closet. Let the Priests, the Ministers of the Lord, weep between the Porch and the Altar, and let them say; Spare thy People, O Lord; and give not thine Heritage to reproach, that the Heathen should rule over them; wherefore should they say among the People, Where is their God?* To this if we add the substance of my Text, That we should turn to the Lord with all our Heart, whenever we are chastised of him, and not put our trust in other means for deliverance, we have then the full sense and meaning of the whole Duty of Repentance; in the faithful performance whereof we may justly hope for a removal of the Evils we labour under. Thus the Prophet encourages the calamitous People whom he here speaks to, to comfort themselves, being penitent, with considering the
gracious

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gracious and merciful nature of God, who would meet them, returning to him, with the renewed Blessings of Corn, and Wine, and Oyl, and would raise his wind to remove far from them this Army of Locusts into the neighbouring Seas; which is the usual way of clearing a Country of these Creatures: And in the Person of God he promises them, saying, *I will restore to you the Years which the Locust hath eaten, the Canker-worm, and the Caterpillar, and the Palmer-worm, my great Army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in Plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wonderfully with you: and my People shall never be ashamed.*

Now from what has been said, we may justly conclude,

THAT they are Enemies to God and Man, who impute publick Calamities to meer Chance, or the will of the Creature; because in so doing, they divert Men, as far as in them lies, from regarding God as the Governor of the World, and seeking to appease his Wrath, and remove his Judgments, by putting away those Sins which provoked him to inflict them. We see that all the holy Prophets interpreted unseasonable Weather, Blasting, Mildew, Prevalence of Vermin, and the like, as God's Visitation for Men's Sins, and made it an argument to call them to Repentance. And therefore they who expose such pious regards as superstitious Conceits, as too many such there are amongst us, are enemies to God and Man, conspiring all they can to continue the World in a state of Infidelity and Misery.

FOR, II. We learn here, that publick Judgments, such as War, Pestilence, Famine, &c. are to be prevented when approaching, or removed when present, only by a publick Repentance. This all
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the Prophets assure us, in the name of God; and God has so far verified their Words, that the success has always answered, when the duty has been well performed. Perhaps I could not, upon searching, produce a satisfactory reason for it, but we know it to be true, because God has declared it of himself; That he is pleased with a Solemnity in Religion, and loves to be importuned with unwearied Sollicitations, and vouchsafes those Blessings to the united Supplications of his Church, which he will not yield to a single Petitioner.

So that we must ever carefully distinguish between the nature of private and publick Duties. In the one case, we must retire into our Closets; in the other, we must go forth into the Congregation. Private Mortifications we must conceal; publick ones we must own; and be as exemplary as we can in them; that we may both excite our own Zeal, and raise an emulation in others to do likewise. This is an indispensable Duty in all true Members of Christ's mystical Body; the Laws of Christian Fellowship bind them to unite; and joyn together in the publick Worship of God. They who neglect to do this, contribute nothing to the spiritual edification and comfort of one another, and by consequence ought not to be reputed Members of the same Body.

UPON the whole, we see the necessity of maintaining Communion with God, and reconciling our selves to him by acts of humble Devotion and Worship. We are taught by the Prophet, in the judgment here before us, that if we are without the verge of God's Favour and Protection, the most contemptible Vermin become as formidable as the strongest Armies of Men, and easily triumph over us, and destroy us. Let us then be constant to the service of God, and he will make all his Creatures subservient to us; let us render to him

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him the homage and honour of our Sovereign Lord, and he will give us that dominion and victory over all our Enemies, ghostly and bodily, which belongs to us as his Sons: he will defend us from all Adversities which afflict the Body, and from the fiery darts of Sin and Satan which would assault and hurt our Souls; through the Grace, and for the Sake of his dear Son our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom &c.





SERMON XLIII.

On the Twenty-first Sunday after TRINITY.



H A B A K K U K ii. 4.

Behold, his Soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him: but the Just shall live by his Faith.

HOUGH the time of this Prophecy is not notified to us by the mention of any King's Reign, yet we may certainly conclude, from several passages in it, that the Author lived in the days of some of the later Kings of Judah, perhaps under *Manasseh* the Son of *Hezekiah*, as some Interpreters conjecture from his crying out and complaining of Violence, Injustice, and grievous Oppressions which he saw with his own Eyes, and which abounded in a flagrant manner, under the Government of that wicked King. Though others place him as low as *Zedekiah*.

THE main subject of his Prophecy is this. After he has set forth the deplorable state of his Nation, by reason of their incorrigible Sins, he proceeds
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to denounce the Sword of God's Judgments which was unsheathing against them, and points out the quarter from whence it appeared. *I will, says he, raise the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty Nation, which shall spread themselves all over your Land, flying like Eagles, and ravening like evening Wolves; Men who know no Law but their own Will, who shall destroy your Fruits like a blasting Wind, and gather Captives like the Sand upon the Sea-shore; they shall have your Princes in derision, and easily leap over those Walls of your Fortresses, which you think are impregnable.*

HABAKKUK having had this Revelation from God, That the Chaldeans should be the Ministers of his Vengeance against sinful Judah, falls into an holy Expostulation with him about these Dispensations. 'O everlasting God, says he, whose Word is unchangeable as thy self; thou hast given out many Oracles by thy Prophets of old, which are not yet fulfilled amongst us; and canst thou consume us, that we should be no more a People, before they are accomplished? Thou that art of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity in thine own chosen People, why hast thou ordained these Chaldeans for their Judges, a faithless Race of Men, who without scruple devour those that are more righteous than themselves, and prey upon them as freely as the Fisherman, who takes all that comes to his Net; and after all the Victories which thou givest them, they have no Notion of thy Providence, but impute their Success to the Power and Wisdom of their own false Gods.

Now to this Expostulation, which closes the first Chapter, the Prophet tells us here in the second, that he waited most attentively for the Answer of God, and received it, with a Command to write it upon Tables so plain, *that he may run that reads it, or may easily run it over, without*

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Hesitation, it being so legible. And the Substance of the Divine Answer is this: That the *Chaldeans* were indeed such Men as the Prophet had represented them; and that therefore when God had used them as Rods for the Chastisement of his People, he would throw them into the Fire, and utterly consume them. This Burden of the *Babylonian* begins at the fifth Verse of this Chapter, *Because he transgresseth by Wine, and is proud; the Pride of Nebuchadnezzar, and the Drunkenness of his Grandson Belshazzar, are mentioned in sacred Writ as Occasions of their great Calamities. The first was turned into a Beast for glorying in his mighty Babylon, as the Monument of his immense Riches and Power. The other was delivered into the Hands of the Medes and Persians, in a Night of idolatrous Revels, when he was celebrating the Festival of his false Gods, and prophaning the sacred Vessels of Solomon's Temple, with excessive drinking. The low and shameful Condition into which this Monarch should sink, is described in our Prophet by the Remarks which his conquered and captive Nations should make upon him, taking up a taunting Proverb against him, and saying, Wo to him that encreaseth that which is not his, that ladeth himself with thick Clay; that buildeth a Town with Blood, and establisheth a City by Iniquity. Wo to him that giveth his Neighbour drink, pressing his Bottle upon him 'till he is drunken. Wo to him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise; invocating that which hath no Breath, nor Power to help it self.----* These are the Denunciations of God's Judgments upon *Babylon*, for her Pride and Cruelty, her Luxury and Idolatry. And this is an Answer to that part of *Habakkuk's* Expostulation, why God punished *Israel* by the Sword of the *Chaldeans*: It was not that he exalted that People for any superior Worth in them; for on

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the contrary they were now almost ripe for Destruction, and should survive their Triumphs over the *Jews* but a very short time. *For*, says he, *it is of the Lord of Hosts that the People shall labour in the very Fire*, or rather shall labour for that which shall be fuel for the Fire, and weary themselves for very *Vanity*; meaning that all the Pains the *Chaldeans* took in enlarging and beautifying their famous *Babylon*, should be soon lost in the Flames which should consume it, even as they had consumed the Cities of *Judæa*.

To the other Part of the Prophet's Enquiry, How God would fulfil those Promises to his People, which were not yet accomplished, if he now gave them over into Captivity; the Answer is, That Vision or Prophecy hath its determinate and appointed Time; and though the Accomplishment of it may seem tedious, yet in the end it will speak and not lye; or it will break forth at last like the dawning Day after a Night of Darkness, and no more fail Men, than the Sun in running his Course: *Therefore though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come at last, and will not tarry beyond God's appointed time.* And then follow the Words of my Text; *Behold, his Soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him; but the Just shall live by his Faith.*

IN which Words there is a good deal of Obscurity; it not being plain what they refer to, nor whether we should connect them with the foregoing or following Passages. As they stand in our present Translation, they fall in most naturally with what follows, and must be interpreted of the proud *Babylonian*, who being exalted with his Victories, Wealth, and large Empire, and imagining that no God was able to deliver People out of his Hand, had certainly a Heart much too big for a Man; or rather a Bubble puffed up with vain

Conceit, which quickly burst into Air, and came to nothing. Whereas many of his most abject, impotent Captives, who had Faith enough to believe that God doth whatsoever pleaseth him in the Armies of Heaven, and the Kingdoms of Men, setting up one, and pulling down another; and in consequence of this Faith humbled themselves before him, and importuned him with their Supplications to be merciful unto them, to commiserate their afflicted Condition, and to deliver them out of it; and seriously repented of their Sins, to make way for such Deliverance; such pious Captives, I say, in reward of their Faith, survived their Oppressor, and were finally restored to their own Country.

THIS is a good Sense in which my Text may be interpreted; for it is very true in all its Circumstances; and justly coheres with the next verse, making part of the Character of the *Babylonian* Monarch, and intimating that his Captives were happier than he.

THERE is an antient *Jewish* Interpreter, who expounds this Verse with reference to *Zedekias* and *Jechonias*, two of the last Kings of *Judah*; and his Comment is this; That *Zedekias* his Soul was so lifted up in him, as to cause him to rebel against the King of *Babylon*, contrary to the Oath of Fealty which he had sworn, and the Divine Admonitions given him by the Prophet *Jeremiah*, and therefore he perished in his Rebellion: whereas *Jechonias*, hearkening to the Word of the Prophet, and submitting himself to *Nebuchadnezzar*, when he made War upon him, obtained his Life and Liberty, as the Reward of his Obedience and Trust in God. But this is not strictly true: For *Jehoiachin*, alias *Jechoniah*, who was *Zedekiah's* Predecessor, was a very wicked King, as we learn from the History of the Kings, and from *Jer. xxii.*
and

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and by him God was provoked to send an Army of *Chaldeans* to besiege *Jerusalem*, who took him Prisoner in the eighth year of his Reign, and put him in Chains, and carried him to *Babylon*, and there confined him thirty seven Years, till the death of *Nebuchadnezzar*, whose Son and Successor *Meredach* was more favourable indeed to this *Jacariah*, releasing him out of Prison, and admitting him to eat at the royal Table; but this did not last long, and he ended his Days in Captivity.

So that his Character will not suit with that part of my Text which says, *the Just shall live by his Faith*. And if it did, yet no good Reason can be given, why this single Verse should be interpreted of *Zedekiah* and *Jacariah*, who are not pretended to be hinted at in any other part of this Prophecy.

I proceed therefore to a third Exposition of these Words, very different from the two former, but such as is warranted by the Seventy Greek Interpreters, who render the words to this Sense: *If any Man draw back, my Soul shall have no Pleasure in him: but the Just shall live by Faith*. Here we see the former part of the Verse differs very much from that which we find in our *English* Bibles: yet, so various is the Signification of the same *Hebrew* Words, that we may allow our own Translators to have been faithful, and yet accept of this last Sense, as sound and good. Indeed some of the most learned and judicious of our Moderns have proved, that it is consonant to the original *Hebrew*, and it has this great Advantage above the other, that it is followed by *St. Paul, Heb. x. 38*.

Now the Words thus interpreted, must be connected with the foregoing Verse; together with which they make this Sense: That whereas *Habakkuk* had demanded of God, How he would make good those Promises to his People, which

were not yet fulfilled, if he was determined to send them into Captivity; the Divine Answer is this: That God has the Times and Seasons in his own hands, when he will fulfil all his Words, none of which can fail or be falsified: that it is our Duty to rely upon his Veracity, and to live in the firm Persuasion of the Truth of his Promises: That if any of us withdraw our Obedience and reject any Article of his Word, because it is not yet accomplished, we shall fall under his heavy Displeasure, and incur the Pains of Apostates and Infidels; but that *he who endureth unto the End, shall be saved.* He that believeth God's Word so, as to walk worthy of the great Things which he has promised to do for him, shall have his Faith crowned with a happy Accomplishment.

THIS is a very pious Sense, and worthy of the Oracles of God. But it is still fuller, if we render part of the third Verse according to the Version of the LXX, and the quotation of St. Paul; *though he tarry, wait for him; for he that cometh, will come, and will not tarry* beyond his appointed time; and with the Apostle understand them of the Messiah, who is often styled *He that cometh, or should come into the World.* So we hear the Jews enquiring of John the Baptist, Matt. xi. *Art thou he that should come, or must we look for another?* So they sung *Hosannah to him that cometh in the Name of the Lord,* Matt. xxi.

FROM the Words thus explained, we may raise several useful Observations.

1st, WE see the Method which God has taken in revealing to us Things to come. He has thought it sufficient to reveal to us the Things themselves, without notifying the Time, generally speaking, when they shall be performed and manifested in the World. I say, generally speaking: For the Time of the accomplishment of some Predictions was

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was notified at the Delivery of them. Thus God told *Noah*, that he would bear with the Manners of the old World one hundred and twenty Years longer. Thus he acquainted *Abraham* that his Seed should sojourn in a strange Land, and be oppressed with Servitude four hundred Years. And this Generation to whom *Habakkuk* prophesied, had Notice from him, and *Jeremiah*, and *Ezekiel*, that *Nebuchadnezzar*, then reigning in *Babylon*, should carry them into Captivity, and that some of them who were faithful and believed in God, should live to see an End of it. But then there were other Prophecies which were sealed up as to the Time of their Accomplishment, particularly those relating to the Messiah, to the second Captivity and Dispersion of the *Jews*, and to several Things which are not yet come to pass in the World.

2dly, WE see the great Sin of Infidelity, and how much of the Divine Displeasure we incur, when we disbelieve any Word of God, only because the Completion of it falls not within the Time which we had reckoned upon for the doing of it. Why should the Wit of Man undertake to discover that which the Wisdom of God has thought fit to conceal? Or why should we think it would have been for our Advantage, to have known more of future Occurrences, and the Time of their Events, than we do know? Since we find in sacred Writ, that when the Time of People's Visitation has been presignified to them, they have been never the better for the Fore-knowledge of it. Neither the old World nor *Sodom* were the better for being told, by *Noah* and *Lot*, that the threatened Judgments would fall upon those Men to whom they were denounced. But they were the same Men, and their Ways and Manners the same to the last, *because they would not believe the time of their Visitation.*

AND

AND though God visited his People, and redeemed them out of *Egypt* according to the Time which he had presignified to their Fathers, yet how unprepared were they to believe *Moses* and *Aaron*, even when they confirmed their Mission by working Miracles before their Eyes? And when they were rescued into Liberty by the manifest Hand of God, yet they would not trust him for the Accomplishment of his Promise, but their Infidelity was such as hindered them from entering into the land of *Canaan*. So little will it avail us to know the most punctual Times of Events, if we have not a Heart to believe every Word of God.

3dly, WE hear the Blessing which accompanies our sincere Belief and dutiful Observance of God's Word; *The Just shall live by his Faith*. So *Noah* and *Lot* escaped the Destruction which consumed all the People round about them, because they believed the Warnings of God, and fled from it in the Way which he shewed them. So in the Wars and Invasions of *Judea* by the *Chaldeans*, those that hearkened to the Prophets of God, and followed their Directions, had their Life for a Portion. The Psalms and the Prophets abound with Acknowledgments of this kind, that *Salvation is of the Lord*. They are the Confessions of holy Men, who by daily Experience had tried the Word of God, and found that it always brought their Affairs to a happy Issue, and upon that account recommend it to all others, as a means of Success and Safety, which will never fail them.

BUT this is much more clearly, and without any shadow of contradiction true, in reference to spiritual Things and a future State, that *the Just shall live by his Faith*. For this Faith, as St. Paul defines it, *Heb. xi. is the Substance of Things hoped for, the Evidence of Things not seen*. We can no other-

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otherwise apprehend such things, than as they are exhibited to us by the word of God, whence we must derive our knowledge of them, and upon which we must rely both for the Certainty of their Existence, and the Share which we shall have in them. Indeed we have no adequate conceptions of these things at present; those Divine Oracles which call us to the enjoyment of them, assure us that mortal faculties are too narrow to comprehend them; our Eyes cannot see, our Ears hear, nor our Hearts conceive of them. Which surely is a very powerful Argument to excite our Faith, and make us attend to the Holy Scriptures about these things. For if we are persuaded that they are the words of God, instructing us and leading us in the way to his Heavenly Kingdom, we must of necessity believe that his Way is right, and his Blessings as valuable as he represents them to be; and if so, *how shall we escape, if we neglect them?* and why should we not dread those Punishments, which we have equal reason to believe are prepared for Infidels? Dares any man say, that he wants grounds to believe them, if he admits God to be the Revealer? who has given us the Authority of his own Word for them, on purpose to serve instead of all other Arguments; and to satisfy us as fully as if we had the Evidence of our own Eyes; which indeed we cannot have in this earthly State; for while we are in the Body, we can see Spiritual things but very imperfectly, and must live by Faith, not by Sight.

INDEED our Evidences of God and Heaven are very sufficient; and the cause of our Atheism and Infidelity, is not want of convincing Arguments of the Truth of our Religion, but want of a better Heart to receive the Doctrines, and practise the Duties of it. That Pride and Self-conceit which *Habakkuk* complains of in my Text, has
destroyed

destroyed Humility and Modesty, which are the beginning of all true Wisdom. How few are there, who can properly be said to be endued with the Fear of God, but are much more influenced by the corrupt fashions and vices of the times, than by any grace of his Holy Spirit? If we could bring into one body all those men, of whom the Holy Psalmist speaks, that *they are so proud, they care not for God, neither is God in all their thoughts,* together with those whom the Apostle complains of, *who hold the Truth in Unrighteousness,* and while they have a Form of Godliness, want the Power, and serve their own Lusts and Passions more than their Creator and Redeemer; what a small appearance would be left of just men walking in their Integrity, and living by Faith? Our Blessed Lord has foretold the scarcity of such men, saying, *When the Son of man cometh, shall he find Faith on the Earth?*

THIS is no Objection against the Efficacy of the present Christian Ministry, or the fitness of its Ordinances to convert the Hearts of sinful men. For we know that the main body of mankind have been Infidels under all Religious Dispensations; and the most Holy Prophets in the Jewish Church have assured us, that they generally found the Heart of man too proud, obstinate, and carnal, to receive any good Impressions from their most zealous Exhortations; and that it was well if now and then a man was struck and affected with their words, when they denounced the Judgments of God against the Sins of their times.

THIS shows that the History of the Fall of Man is no Fable. For as at first he entered into confederacy with the Devil, and transferred his Allegiance from God to him, so he still is manifestly under the influence of his Suggestions, and
commonly

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commonly led captive by him at his Will, to fight against God and destroy his Kingdom upon Earth. And it is found by the experience of above five thousand Years, as impossible to convert a world of men, as to reform the Apostate Spirits themselves. The only difference is this, That these are wholly past Redemption, whereas among the Sons of men there are some few Children of God, fore-known to their Heavenly Father; for whose Salvation he has revealed the way of Happiness, first by his Prophets, and afterwards by his Son; and still continues the light of his Gospel in the World, that they may walk in it.

THE number of these is unknown to us, but the particulars may be known by their fruits, for they bring forth the fruits of the Spirit of Christ; *and they make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the Lusts thereof*, for they live by Faith: they can feast upon the things of God and Religion; without these their Souls cannot be satisfied, no more than their bodily Appetites without meat and drink. *Their conversation is in Heaven*, they dwell there in Heart and Affections, and are but Strangers and Pilgrims upon Earth.

THIS is the only true Life that men can live. All without it is but Dream and vain Imagination. To live with the World's happy People; to be always rioting upon the pleasures of Sense, always feeding upon luxurious Entertainments, and running after variety of shows and diversions with the Voluptuous; or laying up Riches, and adding house to house, and field to field, with the Covetous; or entering the lists of Contention with the Ambitious for the honours and preferments of the World; what is all this, but enslaving the Spirit to the Flesh, and laying a foundation of Happiness in the waves of this troublesome World, in such things as are of a transitory, inconstant nature, which

which fill the Soul with such worms of care and distraction, as eat out the real Pleasures even of this present mortal Life!

But he that liveth by the Faith of the Son of God, has quite different Affections and Notions of things: He considers Heaven as his Father's house, and chiefly studies how he may become a worthy Member of his Family. To this end he daily endeavours to conform himself to the Image of the most High, by improving those Graces in his Soul, which are the Rays of his most beloved Attributes: and is careful to lay up Treasure in Heaven, by abounding in such good works here, as he shall hear of with Joy at the Tribunal of his Lord.

This is the genius and conduct of the man, who lives by the Faith of Jesus Christ. May we all manifest our engraftment in him, by bringing forth the fruits of his Holy Spirit, and order our Conversation here, as men who expect the Resurrection of the Body, the Judgment of the last day, and that Eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven, which Christ hath purchased for those who shall then be found faithful Doers of his Word. To him &c.

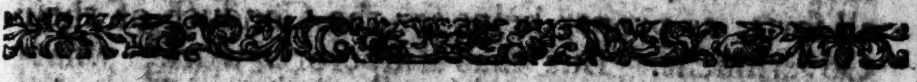


SERMON



SERMON XLIV.

On the Twenty-second Sunday after TRINITY.



PROVERBS ii. 6.

For the Lord giveth Wisdom: out of his mouth cometh Knowledge and Understanding.

 HIS Book of *Proverbs* carries its Author's name in the very entrance and first words. I say, the Author; for *Solomon* is allowed by the most learned *Rabbies*, to be not barely the Collector, but Composer of these divine Sentences: 'Tis part of the Account of that Supereminent Wisdom wherewith God endued him, that he spoke three thousand *Proverbs*, of which number this Book is but a part, containing not above nine hundred, as they stand divided in our Scriptures.

Now it was the custom of many Eastern Sages, when their Thoughts ran upon any thing which concerned common Life, to reduce them into some short and pithy Sentence, which might easily be

be retained in memory, and applied upon Occasion as a rule of Action. And none fitter to frame such Sentences than a wise King, of universal insight and skill in all matters Human and Divine. From such a person they flow, like so many Oracles, with the greatest Authority. For which reason *Augustus Caesar*, though he was not the Inventor, was the Compiler of many Religious, Philosophical, and Politick Maxims; *Suetonius* informing us in the History of his life, That when he read any *Greek* or *Latin* Writer, he selected such wholesome Precepts as were useful in publick or private Life, and recommended them to his Domesticks, military Officers, and Magistrates of all sorts, as proper helps for the Conduct of their Government. But that Emperor's work, whatever is become of it, is rendred unnecessary, by the Proverbs of this wisest of Earthly Kings here before us, which plentifully furnish us with Maxims of Piety, Prudence and Virtue in all states and conditions of Life whatever.

THE Foundation which he lays of true Wisdom, *i. e.* of acting prudently and for the best in all Affairs, is *the knowledge and fear of God*. And how shall men come to be endued with this knowledge and this fear? Why, by diligent search and study in the Divine Writings. *For the Lord giveth Wisdom; out of his mouth proceedeth Knowledge and Understanding*. Of which words we may say as the Disciples said to Christ, *here he speaks plainly and without a Proverb*; there is no riddle or mystery in them; but they contain these two plain assertions:

I. THAT God is the only Fountain of all true Wisdom: And

II. THAT the only way which we have to draw Wisdom out of this Fountain, is, by studying and practising the Sacred Oracles of God.

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THE first of these Assertions, though one would think it a self-evident truth, has met with much opposition from many great pretenders to Wisdom. They say that the Deity is not the only source of it, but that much of it may be attained by a converse with Beings most opposite to him, even with wicked and reprobate Spirits. Such were the Oracles and Gods of the *Gentiles*, which the wisest men among them, not excepting *Socrates* himself, consulted, to learn of them how to set about and manage their most weighty Affairs. And multitudes of People there are in the World at this day, who have a mighty opinion of the Wisdom of these Spirits.

BUT this their Opinion, how common soever, is a gross mistake; and the mistake arises from their confounding the Notions of *wisdom* and *craft*, or cunning, together, and taking them for one and the same thing: whereas they are widely different. For a wise man cannot maintain his Character, without doing always that which is just and right. He may pursue his own Pleasure, Honour, and Profit, but he must pursue them only in subordination to the Laws of Piety and Virtue. He may love himself; but he must likewise love his Neighbour as himself. He must not be so fond of any good thing, as to obtain it by the Arts of Fraud and Circumvention. He can see the ways of thriving in the World, as well as other men, but his wisdom will not permit him to make use of any means but such as are fair and honest. In short, a Wise man is vigilant, active, prudent, dextrous in spying out all Advantages to benefit himself and his Friends; but no-body shall ever be able to persuade him, that an ill thing can be a real Benefit, or the part of a wise Man or a true Friend. He is diligent to improve in any useful knowledge; he is pleased with any external Faculties and Abi-

ties to accomplish his just designs: but he will not abuse them so, to gratify himself, as at the same time to injure and oppress others by them.

BUT now a cunning and crafty man lays this down to himself for a general Rule, That by all means whatsoever he must gain his point, and come at the End which he aims at. And in his pursuit of it, he will proceed in the path of Righteousness, if that leads him most directly and easily to it. For he has no quarrel against the Truth for its own sake; whenever it is of his side, he makes great Ostentation of it; and no man pleads more for it, and exclaims louder against the wickedness of those who would pervert it, whenever any injury is like to be done to himself. But when the Truth is on the opposite side, though he sees it never so plainly, yet being immoveable in his first Principle, which, as I have just noted, is to gain his end by any means whatever, he first bespatters this adversary Truth with all imaginable defamations, to render it odious to the Spectators; and then strikes at it furiously in this Disguise, to make it fall before his own cause, which he paints with all the colours of Sincerity and Honesty, and prosecutes with so much Zeal, that whatever discoveries others may make, he may have this chance left to save his Reputation at last, that he may pass for a well-meaning, though mistaken man.

AND herein consists the great strength of cunning and crafty People, to be able to act their part so dextrously, and play the Hypocrites so well, as to pass in the World for lovers of the Truth, which they are continually destroying; and after all the ill things they have done, to seem to be honest good men, *i. e.* to carry an appearance of living by rules, while they are under no restraints, but make it their whole business to serve their temporal Interests, and gratifie their carnal Lusts.

THE difference then between the wise and cunning Man, is briefly this: the wise Man studies to be thoroughly and substantially good; the cunning Man contents himself with the shadow and appearance of Goodness; the one confines himself within the bounds of that which is just and right; the other scruples not to help himself with the arts of falsehood and wrong: the one would rather suffer injuries than do them; the other would rather do them to all the World, than suffer them to be done to himself.

NOW to apply this to the matter in hand, and judge of the Capacity of evil Spirits by these Rules: of their commerce with the World has been always under the character of subtle and crafty Beings. Their Oracles have delivered several Maxims of Truth and Goodness, not for the love of them, but only to purchase to themselves the Reputation of divine Beings; and that they might afterwards more easily impose evil for good upon those who consulted them, and be obeyed when they recommended to them sinful Practices as their bounden Duty, and those ways for their Safety, which brought them to Destruction; which was the notorious consequence and issue of many of their Oracles.

AND this confirms the conclusion which we laid down at first, that God alone is the Fountain of all true Wisdom.

AND that which in the next place demonstrates this, conveying and communicating this Wisdom to Men, is the Word of God; for *out of his mouth proceedeth knowledge and understanding.*

WE cannot properly display and set forth the grounds of this Assertion, how sacred Writ comes to be the storehouse of true Wisdom, without answering two or three Questions, which may arise from this Assertion.

As, 1st, How does it appear that the Books which are called the Word of God, contain the Precepts of sound Wisdom, i. e. such rules as, when duly practised, will advance the Doer of them to real Happiness? For this is the great end to which we naturally aspire, and whatever will not help us to attain it, does not deserve the name of Wisdom. For though the sentence of the old Roman Poet *Ennius*, which is to this effect, that *the wise Man has learned his Lessons to small purpose, who cannot serve himself of his Wisdom*, may seem to favour of too much Self-love; yet may it be construed to a very honest Sense; that a wise Man in all his studies and conduct of Life, will have his own ultimate happiness in view, and rescue himself by his Sagacity, from all Hardships and Sufferings, as much as he fairly can. Now the wise Men of the World seem to aim at this very end; nay profess, that all their concerns with temporal Affairs, are intended as well to render their own lives commodious and easie, as to do good in the age and place where they live. But most of the World's happy Men do not govern their Actions by the Laws of Holy Scripture; on the contrary, they look upon these Laws to be impediments to their temporal Happiness. So that there is a confessed contrariety between secular and sacred Wisdom.

THE sacred Penman calls *the Wisdom of Men Foolishness with God*; and the World's happy Man explodes and rejects Scripture Politicks, as offering him impracticable rules for the conduct of his Affairs. How then can those Books which are styled the divine Word, contain such wise Directions as lead Men to Happiness?

I answer, 1st, OF secular Wisdom, that this is a vulgar Error, that those who follow the ways and fashions of the World, are truly happy, even in this Life. Possibly some few there are, or have been, whom the Multitude and promiscuous croud
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of Spectators have applauded as the Darlings of good Fortune, but more attentive Observers have commonly discovered something within, which has preyed upon this imaginary Felicity, and destroyed it. And whoever among us are capable of making just Observations, may be satisfied hereof by their own Experience. To which we may add the Suffrage of the wiser sort of meer human Writers, that temporal happiness consists rather in the operations of a pious and virtuous Soul, than in the Acquisition or Possession of abundance of good things. I will venture to appeal to the Doctrines of *Epicurus* himself, the reputed Father of those who place their Felicity in sensual Enjoyments, that it consists neither in the profusions of the Prodigal, nor the abstinence of the Miser; but in a sober, moderate, and virtuous use of agreeable Pleasures; which very few have either the ability or the discretion tolerably to enjoy; and consequently the World's happy Men, who live without the Laws of divine Wisdom, are, even in the opinion of their own Sect, very hard to be found.

ON the contrary, 'tis in the power of every Man to be happy, who governs himself by the directions of the word of God, because that teaches him to possess his Soul in Patience, and be content in every state and condition of Life; as trusting in God, whose Commands he obeys, that he will lead him in the right way, and grant him a happy Issue out of any Affliction. And surely he cannot have so firm a dependence upon any person or thing for his succour, as upon him who by his Power made every Creature, and by his Providence continually governs them. He who is the Lord and Dispenser of Happiness, is certainly our best Director and Guide in the way to it. All other lights are but as Glow-worms to the Sun. The wisest sayings of meer Men are but folly in comparison of his

Word: *Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*

But 2dly, Does not this Word of God enjoyn Men, in certain cases, to suffer things very grievous to Flesh and Blood? We acknowledge that it does so; and yet these Proverbs of *Solomon*, which seldom or never carry our views beyond this Life, do vehemently inculcate upon us a strict adherence to the rules of Piety and Virtue, as what will most effectually conduce to our present Welfare, let the chances and accidents of our Condition be what they will. Such was the Persuasion of this best of Politicians and Philosophers, which he lays for his Foundation, and bravely maintains it all along; and exposes all the Objections of Atheists, Libertines, and Worldlings to the contrary, whom he brands as Fools and Madmen, for pretending to find out any other Happiness, but what is in the ways of Religion and Virtue. This is a high commendation of his sacred Maxims, that they are most beneficial, both for publick Government and private Life, without respect had to any thing hereafter.

However, if he has not drawn the Curtain here between temporal and eternal things, he does it very plainly in the next Book, where he gravely admonishes the young Libertine to remember, in the midst of all his Jollity, *that God will one day bring him into Judgment* for his lawless Sallies and Extravagancies. This is a clear supposition of a future State, and it fully justifies the preference which we gave before to the Wisdom of acting uprightly and as in the sight of God, above a dexterity in the dark arts of Fraud and Hypocrisie. For if any Man will ask me, how I prove that it deserves the name of Wisdom, and is really for our advantage, to live agreeably to the Laws of God; I answer, 'tis evident from hence, that this Legislator will raise us from the Dead, and judge us, and reward

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or punish us to all Eternity, according as we have obeyed or transgressed his Laws. *Solomon* indeed proves the excellency of this Wisdom of Obedience, from the general current of successes and blessings which God vouchsafes to his Servants in this Life. But because there seem to be exceptions from his general Rules, and he himself has observed that oftentimes there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, so that we cannot certainly judge of the Love or Displeasure of God by these external things; therefore the full Illustration of this Wisdom will be at the great day of Judgment and Retribution, to which he likewise points, when we shall see *vastly different states of the righteous and the wicked, of him that served God, and of him that served him not.* And this day of tryal and recompense being as sure to come, as any thing that is now doing or already transacted, it is a sufficient vindication of our Wisdom in making provision for it, by doing those things now, which will secure to us to the joys and comforts of it. With this respect we act wisely and for our real Interest, by obeying the divine Laws in all Circumstances, not only when they are for our temporal Advantage, as many times they are, but even when we cannot obey, without being stripped of all that we have, and deprived of life it self on the account of our allegiance to God. At such a juncture we are most truly wise, when we can immoveably bear our selves disputed against, and upbraided with stupidity by the Men of the World, for not sacrificing a good Conscience to present Gain, and surrendring our heavenly Inheritance for these transitory Enjoyments.

On the other hand, the subtle Hypocrite, who thinks himself very wise, and values himself upon his great Parts and Abilities, if he does but accomplish his unjust Designs, and at the same time conceal his evil Arts from the World, is guilty of

the most deplorable Folly incident to Mankind: Because he lets go the Substance for the Shadow; while he is cheating others of a little Money, or stealing unlawful Pleasures, he cheats himself of his own Salvation, and sells his Soul for a Pittance of wretched filthy Lust or Lucre. And his Folly is farther aggravated, by flattering himself that his Frauds are not discovered: for though he should escape the Notice of Men, which it is not very easie for him to do, yet he is always naked and open to the Eyes of that God, whose Laws he is breaking, and whose Judgment he shall undergo for all his most secret Sins.

HENCE we see what Reason *Solomon* had to allow none the Character of wise Men, but such as fear God; and freely to bestow the Name of Fools upon all those who reject his Word, and refuse to be obedient to his Commands.

AND thus we have shown how God is the only Fountain of true Wisdom, and that his Word is the only means of communicating it to us.

THIS should make us all ready and willing to meditate in his Word, and diligently to apply it to the Government of our Lives. For as we cannot practise it, unless we know it; so our knowing it will avail us nothing, except we be doers of it. But if we will believe this great Master of Divine Science, we can neither know it, nor do it effectually, except we peruse it with good Attention, and pray earnestly for Grace to improve in it. *Thou must*, says he, *incline thine Ear to Wisdom, and apply thy Heart to Understanding; crying after Knowledge, and lifting up thy Voice for it; seeking it as Silver, and searching for it as for hid Treasures: So shalt thou understand the Fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God.* By which Words we must conclude, that it is no such easy matter as some imagine, to make ourselves Masters of heavenly

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venly Wisdom; but we must joyn much Prayer, Study and Practise together, before we can have a just Relish and Notion of it.

INDEED it ought to be so, according to that ancient Maxim, that *excellent Things are attended with Difficulties*, and not to be attained without much Pains. But then the Attainment of them well rewards the Pains that is taken about them; especially in this Case, where every Lesson that we learn, every Rule that we practise, conduces to the Sanctification of our Souls, and raises them to a nearer Communion with God, and sight of spiritual Things. And it is a farther Argument why we should be much conversant with the sacred Writings, because they only contain the Words of eternal Life. Other Masters can instruct us in the Arts and Sciences which concern the present Life, but the sacred Penmen alone *are able to make us wise unto Salvation.*

LET us then take the royal Preacher's Word for it, that this Science of Divine Wisdom requires very intense and serious Application of Mind, thoroughly to apprehend it. Or if we are not sufficiently moved by his Authority, let us hear a greater than *Salomon*, even the Son of God himself, who not in one, but a great many Passages of his Gospel, calls for diligent Disciples both to hear his Will and to do it. Of which Number may all of us be found, through his Grace who liveth and reigneth &c.



SERMON



SERMON XLV.

On the Twenty-third Sunday after TRINITY.



PROVERBS xi. 11.

By the Blessing of the upright the City is exalted: but it is overthrown by the Mouth of the wicked.



THIS is one of King Solomon's political Maxims, an excellent Remark on the Causes of the flourishing or ruinous State of any Nation or Society of Men.

AND surely this King was admirably qualified to make such Observations, as having earnestly besought God, at the beginning of his Reign, to give him a wise and understanding Heart, for this very Purpose, that he might be capable of administering his Government in the best manner; and God fully granted his Petition.

AND his own thorough Knowledge of the World had informed him, that publick Happiness, according to common Estimation, consists in a general good Health, and Peace, and Plenty of
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all Things fit for the use of Man. But he knew withal that the Manners of Men, more especially of those who are employed in Governments, are the fundamental and meritorious Cause of these Things. To their different Morals therefore he imputes the publick Prosperity or Misfortunes. *By the Blessing of the upright the City is exalted: But it is overthrown by the Mouth of the wicked.*

By the *Upright* here, we are to understand, Men of sufficient Abilities for the Stations which they fill, and of Piety and Resolution enough to discharge the Duties of their Places. For instance, an upright King, or supreme Governour of any Denomination, considers himself as the common Father of his People: in pursuance of which Character, he hath, in all his Conduct, an Eye to their Felicity. And knowing how prone Children are to transcribe their Parents Manners into their own Practice, he is very careful to set them a fair Copy of Piety and Virtue in his own Example. And as a wise and affectionate Father of a private Family, will not, if he knows it, take such wicked Servants into his House, nor, when he sends his Children abroad, place them under the Government of such People, as are likely to corrupt their Morals, or abuse them in their just Rights and Privileges: So a good and gracious Prince, since he cannot be every where in Person, will be careful, without Favour or Affection, to set such Magistrates over his People, as are Men fearing God, and hating Iniquity, and will honestly study to preserve them *in Wealth, Peace, and Godliness*, i. e. to promote both their temporal and eternal Felicity; and will certainly remove those whom he once plainly discovers to be otherwise. And thus much of the general Spring of Prosperity, as it diffuses it self over a whole Nation, in the Care and Conduct of the supreme Governour.

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BUT because it might be in *Israel*, as it is with us, that particular Cities and Societies of Men have the Election of their own Magistrates, at least several of them, wherein the Prince can only wish them well; therefore *Solomon* gives them this good Advice: 'If ye have any Concern for the welfare of your Community, endeavour to prefer such Men to the chief Places in it, as not only profess themselves well affected to the Worship of God, but are known and seen duly and conscientiously to attend upon it, living and acting as in his Presence, and as those who must one day answer it to him, how they have regarded his Word, and employed the Talents which he has given them, to his Honour and the Benefit and Comfort of his People. Such Men, as these will derive a Blessing both upon themselves, and the place where they live: *By their Righteousness a City shall be exalted.*' And that various ways, as

Ist, WHEN righteous Magistrates are in Authority, good Laws are enacted, and impartially administred; Virtue meets with its Encouragements, and Vice with its due Restraints and Punishments. For such Magistrates have no Crimes of their own, to make them ashamed or afraid to punish them in other Offenders: No corrupt Affections or selfish Views, to incline them to give a wrong Sentence in Judgment; to reject a virtuous and worthy Person, when he sues to them for any Preferment, and to confer it upon some wicked, worthless Wretch, only because he or his Friends are more able to *remunerate*. This Consideration, alas! often prevails for the Suffrage of a Man in Power, that by serving the Party recommended to him, he shall have his own turn served another time. But if such Party be much worse qualified than others who sue for the same Favour, then such

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such *Elector* betrays his trust, and prostitutes the publick Welfare to his own private Advantage. He does an Act which discourages virtuous Industry, and obviates the Designs of those who would leave farther Rewards to it, by plainly perverting the Wills of such as have already made Provision for it. He provokes the Displeasure of the God of Truth and Justice, who delights to see these Virtues exercised in the Earth, and is proportionably offended with the Men of any place where he sees them neglected. But when the Laws are justly executed, the Gifts of Benefactors rightly applied, and good and bad Men distinguished by proper Rewards and Punishments, God and Man are pleased with such Administrations, and consent to favour the Places where they are exercised.

Idly, The faithful Dispensers of the sincere Word of God, must needs contribute very much to the Happiness of the Place where they live. Because by their frequent Exercise of devout Prayers, and Preaching, and Administration of the Sacraments, and other Acts of spiritual and holy Conversation, they reconcile God to Men, and at the same time turn the Hearts of some Men at least to the Love and Fear of God. Those who know any thing of true Happiness, are satisfied that it consists in our worthy Notions and exalted Contemplations of the Divine Majesty; and that every clearer Manifestation of him to our Souls, makes an Addition to our spiritual Comfort; that to glorify, praise, and honour him, is our best Employment and most desirable Life. And therefore those who propagate the Knowledge of God, and excite Men to glorify him, must in reason be esteemed the Instruments of Men's Felicity. The World, as bad as it is, has ever so esteemed them, and disputes not the Truth of that sacred Oracle which declares,

that those who turn many to Righteousness, shall shine as the Sun in the Kingdom of their heavenly Father. Dan. xii. 3. Matt. xiii. 43.

Thirdly, Every upright Man, of what Station soever, is a Blessing to the Place where he lives. If he sanctify the Name of God with his Mouth, and acknowledge him in all his Ways, attending on the Exercise of his Worship whenever he has Opportunity, especially at the Seasons of God's own appointing. If he be true and just in all his Dealings, beneficent according to his Ability, sober and temperate in his Pleasures, meek and merciful in his Treatment of others. In short, if he have so much of a publick Spirit, and Principle of humanity in him, as to desire his Neighbours Prosperity as well as his own, and be ready upon all reasonable Occasions to do good Offices to others, as he would be glad they should do for him when he wants them; such a Man as this, is a very good Member of any civilized Community. And if Men of this Character did but out-number a contrary sort, in all the trading Parts of our Nation, then every Town, City, and Society among us, would soon be in a very comfortable and flourishing Condition. Such Righteousness would establish our Foundations, and mingle Blessings with all our Goods and Riches.

Let us now proceed to the other Branch of my Text, which points out the Cause of a contrary Effect, affirming that a City is overthrown and brought to Destruction by the Mouth of the wicked. And this too happens in all the aforementioned Cases.

I. At the Tribunals of Justice, in tryals of right and wrong, an unjust Sentence has often proceeded from the mouth of a partial Judge, a corrupt Jury, or a false Witness. A written Law is sometimes put upon the wrack, till it speaks the

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the Sense of those who have the handling of it, very different from the intent and meaning of the Legislator. And though the Law be permitted to speak its natural and genuine Sense, yet if the Cause to be try'd by it, be misrepresented, the issue thereof must needs be unjust. Both these ways are very offensive to God, who has laid the strictest injunctions upon all that are concern'd about Tribunals, to declare the truth, without turning from it for any motive of love or hatred, hope or fear whatsoever. He has repeated his abhorrence of a prevaricating Tongue, and threatned to punish it with the severest Judgments. And those who swear to speak according to Truth, do wittingly subject themselves to all the effects of God's displeasure when they swear falsely. So that they arm the avenging hand of Divine Justice against them, and carry a Curse with them where-ever they go. And they are farther general Enemies to mankind, in that they defeat the Innocent in the last resort that he has in this World to make the justice of his cause appear; they oftentimes murder him by an unjust death, and subvert his whole Family, by divesting them of all their Goods and Possessions. They turn the edge of that Sword against all sorts indifferently, which was designed for a terror to none but Evil-doers. And this may suffice to shew how destructive the mouth of the wicked is to a Community, when it perverts the current of Justice and Judgment.

II. In dispensing the divine Word, and treating of the Mysteries and Doctrines of Religion, it is of most destructive consequence to the People, if the mouth of the wicked have the handling of them. For then the People will be sure to be divided by that Religion which was designed to unite them, and be emboldned to disobey God by the authority of his own mis-interpreted

preted Word. This is so true, not in meer speculation, but woful experience, that the Foundations of all good Government have been unsettled by some such Interpreters; and scarce a passage of Sacred Writ, which was written for man's Salvation, but what has been wrested to his Destruction, and made a warrant for his committing some Sin. How mischievous must this be to any City or Society; when the Members of it are taught to clash with one another upon principles of Conscience, *and hold the truth of God in unrighteousness*. Pure Religion is certainly the very best Cement of civil Society, as mightily enforcing the duties of Unity, Peace, and Love among men: but Religion corrupted in the Doctrines of Faith or Practice, carries with it the Seeds of endless strife and contention, and ministers occasion to continual debates and animosities. This is *changing the Bread of life into a Serpent or a Scorpion*. Nothing can tend more to dissolve the Kingdom of Christ, than the dividing and subdividing of it by various errors, which are the Tares sown by our Spiritual Adversary, to destroy the Wheat; and in some once flourishing parts of our Christian World it has been long since quite destroy'd by them.

III. IN the daily Affairs and Transactions of common Life, the mouth of the wicked does much towards the destroying the Publick good. Consider the Blasphemies and Execrations which are daily vented by all sorts of People among us, and wonder that our *Island* is not long since swallowed up of the Sea, or consumed by fire from Heaven. Not that this is an argument that God does not hear nor regard what passes in the World: far from it; his wrath has evidently been revealed from Heaven against all Iniquity and Impiety. There is not a reigning Crime in this or the former

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mer Ages of the World, which has not been so plainly animadverted on by a supernatural Power, that all who saw it, might say, *This hath God done, and perceive very well that it was his work.* But his general method with these Miscreants is, Patience, Forbearance, and Long-suffering, *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.* However, though he does not instantly transfix the Blasphemer with his thunder, yet the Impiety itself is an immediate Punishment to the place where it is committed. It reproaches the Community as a company of Atheists, who can endure that the Deity should be thus insulted and affronted amongst them. It is most grating and offensive to the ears of pious Persons, who abhor such wretches as the common Enemies of God and all Goodness. It gives them an idea of the infernal Regions, where raging Blasphemy reigns triumphant. It certainly withholds many divine Blessings from such an execrable crew: The Spirit of God is gradually restrained, and finally withdrawn from them. The comforts of Nature lose their taste, and even the beams of the Sun grow languid, and are much impaired in their influence upon such accursed ground.

BESIDES, there is a canker in the Commerce, a leprosie in the goods of a People devoted by their Perjuries and Execrations to the tyranny of reprobate Spirits. For can any thing of a blessing rest upon those, *whose delight and pleasure is in Cursing and Lies?* Suppose they resort sometimes to the House of Prayer, what can their Prayers avail, if they may be said to pray at all, *whose tongues in the general are set on fire of Hell,* as St. James speaks? So then, so many Prayers are wanting to implore the Mercies of God upon the City, and so many affronts and defiances are added, to avert all the Powers of Heaven from the pro-

tection of it. But now the divine Revelation assures us, that our humble Supplications and correspondent Manners are necessary to render the Holy God propitious to us. We therefore justly conclude, That a City must needs be in the way of Destruction, whole Inhabitants are averse to their Prayers, and audacious in their Blasphemies. And thus much may suffice for the demonstration of Solomon's maxim, *That by the blessing of the Righteous the City is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the Wicked.*

AND if this be well demonstrated, 'tis a fair warning to all Cities which are concerned for their own preservation, that they be very careful to encrease the upright, and diminish the number of the wicked among them. That they be very ready upon all Occasions to embrace the one, and testify a neglect and aversion to the other.

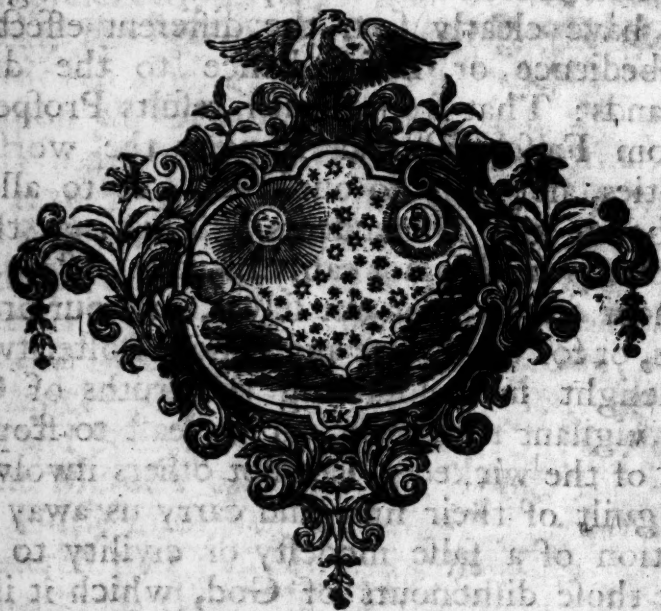
THIS is very just and upright dealing. For who will dare to condemn the Conduct of any master of a Family, who will not throw open his house to Robbers, nor permit his Domesticks to converse with those who are infected with the Pestilence? And such is every impious man to the City and Society where he dwells. He robs them of the Mercies of God; he brings the infection of a Curse into their Habitations. I have often wondered that the considerate and governing part of mankind, should be so negligent of their own security, and so easie to partake of other mens sins, as to suffer their dependents and inferiors to involve them in the wrath, and subject them to the judgments of God, for want of a Spirit to exert their Zeal for his Glory, and be the Executioners of his just vengeance in correcting such profligate Wretches. Shall God so loudly proclaim, as he has done in his word, his displeasure against all Unrighteousness and Impiety of men;
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and shall those whom he has invested with his own Authority, *to be a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well,* shall they be afraid to exercise this Authority in the vindication of his Honour and Glory? Then surely *Faith and Truth are perished from among the Children of men;* and God will be glorified in the Destruction, rather than the Pardon of such rebellious Creatures. Whatever schemes of the divine Mercy some men may draw in their own imaginations, 'tis certainly no diminution of the Goodness of God, but rather a vindication of his Truth and Justice, that in Epidemic corruptions he will not spare, but visits publick Enormities with publick Scourges.

WE have clearly seen the different effects of our Obedience or Disobedience to the divine Commands: That from Truth results Prosperity, and from Falsehood and Impiety the worst of Calamities, not only to ourselves, but to all our Neighbours and Dependents. This is a three-fold Cord, which is not easily broken. If we have any tender concern for our selves, and our present Friends, or for our future and remote Posterity, we shall delight in maintaining the truths of God, and be vigilant to reform, or at least to stop the mouth of the wicked. Let not others involve us in the guilt of their sins, and carry us away with the notion of a false modesty or civility to connive at those dishonours of God, which it is our place and business to correct. By such connivance we betray our want of discretion, in the greatest disservice to the Offenders, to ourselves, and to all that are about us; we suffer sins to grow upon them, and to pull down the Judgments of God upon their and our own heads; which many times might be prevented, by due and speedy restraints of such provocations.

LET us then, as many of us have any Authority or Power, exert it upon all just occasions, in the cause of Truth, to the extermination of all that is contrary to it: So shall we both entitle our selves and those whom we shall reduce from error, to the gracious Protection of God in this life present, and to his everlasting Salvation in that which is to come, through the merits of Christ Jesus our Lord; To whom &c.





SERMON XLVI.

On the Twenty-fourth Sunday after TRINITY.



PROVERBS xiii. 20.

*He that walketh with wise Men shall be wise:
but a Companion of Fools shall be destroyed.*

VERY one must justifie this Proverb at the first hearing of it, and allow it to be an excellent rule of Society in every stage and condition of Life. The Manners of Men are not formed so much by Nature, as by Society and Conversation. Our nature indeed, our constitution is the soil which is productive of Virtue or Vice. The temperament of the Body, and the inclinations of the Mind, are what we commonly deriye from our Parents; and yet the force of education is often seen in this, that those who most resemble their Parents in their Features and Dispositions, are by use and custom drawn into very different sentiments and ways of Life. In short, that sort of People who are most

conversant with us, make the deepest impression of their words and actions upon our Minds, and do in a great measure infuse their own Wills, Opinions, and Affections into us. For which reason it very much concerns both our present and future Happiness, that a good choice be made of Persons who shall be admitted to a near and intimate converse with us, especially in the growing Years and Ascent of Life: *For he that walketh with wise Men, shall be wise: but a companion of Fools shall be destroyed.*

Now to walk with wise Men, is to converse with them, and give attention to their instructions whether living or dead. But how can we converse with the Dead? even by their Books which they have written and left behind them. And this makes my Text a very practicable Rule: for perhaps it would be difficult for the younger sort in every place to meet with a proper Guide, whose quality, age, or employment could admit them to have free access to him upon all occasions. But by the help of good Books of an easie purchase, the meanest of us, who has least acquaintance in the World, and if he had more, wants proper times and seasons to cultivate it, may at his own leisure hours retire, and converse with the very wisest and best Men that ever lived upon Earth. By the help of Sacred Scriptures, we can be familiarly acquainted not only with this royal Sage, the Author of my Text, but also with *Moses* and the Prophets, with Christ and his Apostles, who being all departed out of this Life, yet continue to speak to us by their written Sermons and Discourses, as plainly as they did to the People of their own times. So that there is no necessary Maxim of Faith or Manners which they ever uttered, but what we have the benefit of by this way of Conveyance; and if we do but apply our Hearts to the learning of them, and regulate our lives by these Maxims, we may very truly

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truly be said to walk with all these wise Men. Our studying of them in order to transcribe them into our Practice, is the very best way of walking with them.

And by walking with wise Men, *i. e.* by delighting in their personal Conversation if living, or their Writings if dead, a young Man will become wise, he will take pleasure in the ways and studies of these Men; he will grow to be a master of their Knowledge, and a partaker of their Spirit, Genius and Affections. This is a necessary Consequence, not only in religious, political, and moral Concerns, but in every Art or Science, Liberal or Mechanick. He who by a strong inclination is led to read the Books and converse with the Masters of Rhetorick, Musick or Mathematicks, will himself become a good Orator, Musician, or Mathematician. Thus we learn to speak any Language, or perform any manual Operation, by giving up our selves to the directions of those who are expert in them, and shew us the way how to attain them. It very rarely happens that a Person is so happy as to be self-taught, to learn any Art or Science without the assistance of a Master. Even though he has the use of Books, he is many times at a loss for the explanation of several passages in them. Like the *Ethiopian Eunuch*, he cannot often understand what he readeth, except he have some Man to guide him. This shows the great dignity of such as are excellent in any part of divine or human Learning, They are not only valuable for the service they do in the exercise of their own Talent, but likewise for their dexterity in communicating it, and multiplying it in the Hands of others, so as to beget many Sons of the like useful Occupation. *He that walketh with wise Men, shall be wise.*

BUT a Companion of Fools shall be destroyed. This is opposed to the former branch of the Text, ac-

ording to the common style of these Proverbs, and agreeable to a known Rule, That *contraries placed together in one view, do most notably illustrate each other.* And so it follows here, that if he that delights in the Society of wise men, must needs learn wisdom of them, then he who chuses the company of wicked Men and Fools, will as surely be infected with their Impieties and Follies. The ground of this consequence is the same as before, *That the Members of any Society act by Imitation, and commonly partake of one another's Manners.*

It is well known, that in this Book of Proverbs, the word *Folly* commonly denotes all kind of Wickedness, which is indeed the greatest Folly, as naturally involving the actors in the worst sort of Mischiefs. So that our *Companion of Fools* here may signify one that keeps any bad company whatever. And in this general Latitude it may be truly affirmed of such a one, that he pursues his own Destruction.

SOME of the Fathers interpret these words of those who frequent Masks, Shows, and all kind of idle Amusements and Buffooneries. And certain it is, that these Sports very much tend to turn the head from every thing that is grave and serious, filling the Mind with a chaos of wild Imaginations, and supplying the Tongue with a perpetual fund of vain, frothy Discourse. We may herein appeal to the observation of all Men, whether ever they knew a Man, much addicted to these Vanities, to retain any true relish for things of a solid nature: His Senses are so vitiated, that the Sacred Scriptures are the favour of death to him: his Understanding is subverted, so that he has false Ideas and Notions of Things; the true Man is destroyed, and a strange romantick Figure of a Man left in the room of him.

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2dly, A Companion of Drunkards, Gamesters and Harlots, comes to destruction by ways which are too well understood; by neglecting his honest Imployment, consuming his Time and his Money, contracting Distempers by his Intemperance and Lewdness, enflaming his Passions, unbridling his Tongue, which throws him into sudden Frays and Quarrels, wherein he often loses his Life, and together with it, all esteem and reputation in this World, and all hopes of happiness in that which is to come. There is a peculiar signification in the word which we here render *destroyed*; the original most properly signifies *broken*; and this is most emphatically verified of such vain, intemperate, lewd Companions as I have been describing. They break their Health and vigorous Constitutions; they break their credit and good character in the World; they break in their Trade, Estate, and Fortune; they break their Families and many other Dependents, and by devouring the Substance which they should live upon, reduce them to Hunger and Nakedness, scatter them about among the corrupt part of the World, expose them to the danger of taking to bad Courses, which will bring them to a shameful end, or at least continue them shameful Monuments of their wicked Ancestors Extravagancies. And thus *a companion of fools is destroyed and broken.*

3dly, A companion of Atheists is a companion of Fools, *i. e. of such as say in their Heart, there is no God, and corrupt each other, and talk of wicked Blasphemy.* He learns of such Fools to think himself wiser than all the World, by disputing against the Word of God, and despising those religious Duties which he requires of us, which the wisest and best of Men have always believed, and esteemed it their greatest Wisdom to reverence and practise. For it is well known that the pious Man for the most part reaps the Blessings of the present Life,

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Life, as well as of that which is to come; and that in consequence of the Promises of God, who is the dispenser of them both; and has sufficiently made himself known in the World by his Mercies to the Righteous, and his Judgments upon Sinners: and though sometimes he permits one event of Good or Evil indifferently to befall them both, as it needs must, when their interests are combined, yet in other circumstances he commonly distinguishes them by marks of his Favour or Displeasure. And therefore the infatuated Companion of Atheists unhappily makes Shipwreck of all his Blessings temporal and eternal. For of his abandoned Masters he learns to cast away the Fear of God, and Reverence for holy things, to neglect those Prayers and acts of religious Worship which God has instituted as means of Grace, to break those divine Laws, in the observance of which alone we can hope for the Presence of God with us, and his Protection of us against those Evils, ghostly and bodily, which continually surround us. All which rewards and advantages that Man forfeits for himself, and many times for his whole Family, and late Posterity, *who delights to make his abode in the tents of the ungodly, who stands in the way of Sinners, and sits in the seat of the Scorners.*

AND this may suffice to expose the Folly of those young Persons who list themselves in the Society of atheistical Men, and learn of them to blaspheme God, and prophane his Sabbaths; whereby they put themselves out of his Protection, and bring down his curse both upon themselves and their Dependents.

NOW from this Text of the royal Preacher, and these Meditations which we have raised upon it, we may deduce these following Inferences.

Ist, THAT it is our wisest and best course to accustom ourselves early to a due attendance at the
house

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house and worship of God? For there we shall be sure to have the company of Wise men. All they are such, who conscientiously perform the duties of this place. Of such we shall learn Wisdom; we shall be animated by them to a godly Zeal, Reverence, and Devotion in the several parts of our Worship; and if we fall into farther acquaintance with them, we shall profit by their good Counsels and Conversation. In this place we are sure to have the blessed fellowship of the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, who in their several turns speak to us and instruct us by the mouth of the Minister, as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.

AND where can we find, on this side Heaven, such an Assembly of men, most famous in their Generations for Sanctity and Wisdom, and honoured with manifold testimonies of God himself, that they walked with him and pleased him? In this place therefore we walk with them, and with their and our God, who has assured us that he is in the midst of such an Assembly, ready to give all good Gifts, especially the Spirit of Wisdom, to all them who shall faithfully ask it of him.

2dly, Our next Wisdom will be, when we are abroad in the World, to avoid the Conversation of all ungodly and vicious Men; I don't mean, that we should have no commerce or dealing with them; for then, as St. Paul says, we must go out of the World; because it so abounds with People of these Characters, that if we have any worldly concerns, we must often be concerned with some of them. But I say, we must not contract any intimate familiarity or friendship with them, so as to run with them into their wicked Courses; for thereby we shall confirm them in their sins, and violate at least, if not quite destroy our own Virtue. The royal Preacher, who knew
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the force of sinful Temptations, cautions us abundantly, in the name of all that is wise and prudent, to keep at a distance, and not come within the verge of their Influence: not to hear them, if we can help it; but if we cannot avoid hearing, yet to turn away, and run from them as fast as we can, before they operate upon our Affections. He tells us that the young man whom he saw enticed and over-persuaded by a strange Woman, when he was once entred into her House, had no more power to rescue himself, than *an Ox which is led to the Slaughter, or a Fool to the correction of the Stocks.* He gives us repeated warnings not to accept of the Presents or Entertainments of Robbers, to lay ourselves under no Obligations to Atheistical or Lustful men, because by so doing we may be drawn into their Acquaintance and their wicked ways. And if we once begin, we know not where to stop, nor what may be the issue. Many a man has lost his Life in a drunken fit, who sate down with a resolution to drink but little; and many another has thrown away his Estate in gaming, who at first could not be persuaded to hazard more than a trifle. And I doubt not but some who have been brought by Atheistical Company to give a Bill of Divorcement to their Religion, had once such an opinion of their own firmness, that they thought nothing could move them, till by the just Judgment of God upon them, for associating themselves with his Enemies, they have been deserted by his Spirit, and delighted to hear those Blasphemies which they once abhorr'd. This deserves our most serious regard; and therefore I would farther inculcate it upon you, that when we begin to affect ill Company, we joyn in Confederacy with the Powers of Darkness against all that is good; and this is the cause why God is so offended with us, that
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he often gives us up to a reprobate mind, to run on from beginnings which we think small and innocent, till we end in the Destruction both of Body and Soul.

3dly, SINCE Wisdom is learned by Society and Conversation, especially in tender years, this should admonish all Parents, who have any regard for the welfare of their Children, to be frequently instilling good Instructions into them, and to enforce them with such Examples, as they would not be sorry nor ashamed to see their Children imitate. There are the most sacred and solemn Injunctions laid upon Children to honour their Parents; and therefore it highly concerns Parents to take heed what Counsels they give their Children, and what Ways they teach them. And though it be no where made a part of Childrens Obedience to imitate their Parents, any farther than as their Actions and Ways are pleasing to God; yet we see Children are very apt to tread in their Fathers steps. So that if the Father were a Drunkard, a Blasphemer, a Sabbath-breaker, a general Despiser of religious Duties, the Child is but too prone to vouch his Authority, at least in his own mind, for doing the same things. And too seldom it is that you see the Son fill that Seat in the Church, which his Father before him commonly left empty. And on the contrary, those Children generally continue their good Affections to Religion in their Family, who have been train'd up to it by the Nurture, Admonition, and good Example of their Parents.

IN the next place, since Company and Example have such an influence to form and change our manners to better or worse, Parents should be very careful, when they send their Children abroad, to place them in such Families as are Orthodox in their Religion, and virtuous in their Conversation,

tion, and where the Master is truly diligent to restrain all his Dependents from a licentious gadding abroad, and running into promiscuous Company at spare times, especially on the Lord's day. For without this vigilant care, Children of the best Parents may soon be corrupted through the negligence or ill example of their Masters, and receive such harm in their Morals, as all the advantages of any Art or Science which they learn, can never be able to compensate.

AND therefore Parents, though perhaps not intentionally, are however in fact, Enemies to their Children, who in placing them abroad, chiefly consult their temporal Interests, and have not the first and principal regard to the Piety and Virtue of their ensuing Lives. And the like consideration ought to be had in Marriages, where the Portion or Estate should not so much induce us to contract affinity, as the sincere Piety and Virtue which has been long established and flourished in the Family. For however either party may shift for themselves, yet what Service can be done for Posterity, if either he or she be unequally yoked with an Atheist, a Libertine, a Person alienated from the love and fear of God, and strongly addicted to the pursuit of sinful pleasures? Such unhappy Companions of Fools are in great danger to be destroy'd both in their own Persons and their Posterity, in all their substantial Felicities, Temporal and Eternal.

St. Paul, I confess, expresses good hopes, that in cases of Christians marrying with Infidels, the Christian Wife might win the Husband, or the Christian Husband might reconcile the Wife to the Faith of Christ. But this he says, not to encourage such matches, but to prevent the separation of the Parties so matcht already: That they should continue together in their Married state,

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state, and labour after and hope for such good fruits of it. But the unmarried Christians he counsels to match with none but those of their own Religion. He knew it was too great a venture for them to run the hazard of being perverted, and the difficulty of well-ordering their Families and educating their Children in such unsuitable matches. And the Objection is as strong now against marrying with any Person of dissolute Principles or Morals: the impediments of comfortable and holy living in such a state are much the same.

WE cannot but know, if we observe any thing of the bent and propension of our own nature, that we are too apt to strike out of the paths of true Wisdom, and lose ourselves in the errors and by-ways of sinful Temptations. We have therefore the more need to fortify ourselves with wise Counsellors and faithful Monitors, whose virtuous conversation and upright walking with us may be a constant bias upon us, to withhold us from evil, and encline our Hearts to that which is good.

ABOVE all, let us not fail to acquaint ourselves with those greatest Masters of divine Wisdom, the Sacred Pen-men of the word of God; of whom we shall be sure to be taught such Precepts as will make us wise unto Salvation. In order to which, let us faithfully attend on the duties of this place, which is the house of our Heavenly Father, the Habitation which he hath pitched among men. Where he manifests himself to his obedient Children, and pours out upon them his Heavenly Gifts and Graces, in the Gospel of his Blessed Son, and the Communion of his Holy Spirit; to whom, three Persons and one God, be all Honour and Glory World without end.

SERMON



SERMON XLVII.

On the Twenty-fifth Sunday after TRINITY.



PROV. xv. i.

*A soft answer turneth away Wrath: but
grievous words stir up Anger.*

THE greatest part of our Conversation
consisting in Discourse, and words being
the most ready and easie way of ex-
pressing our thoughts: there are many
rules laid down in Holy Writ for the
Government of the Tongue, that we be more es-
pecially careful not to offend any one by unbecom-
ing or provoking Language; and if any of our
Superiors, who has a just Authority over us, hap-
pens to be displeased with our conduct, and sharp-
ly reproves us for it, or threatens us with punish-
ment; our wisest way in such cases is, to acknow-
ledge our Offence; and answer a Reproof with
mild and submissive Language: which is most like-
ly to mollifie the Displeasure of an offended Supe-
rior; for *a soft answer turneth away wrath: but
grievous words stir up anger.*

Now

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Now there are three Parties, whose Wrath it may concern us to appease by mild and submissive Language.

I. THE Wrath of God is appeased by this means. For he is provoked every day by the crying sins of an ungodly World, and would quickly break out as a devouring fire upon it; and utterly consume it; but that there are, and always have been in it, holy and humble men, who have been much given to Prayer; and in their Prayers have made unfeigned Confessions of Sin, and cried mightily unto God, that he would not remember nor visit with his Judgments the Iniquities of the present or past Generations. Thus the destruction of *Israel* was prevented by the many humble and devout Addresses of *Moses*; their Captivity was deferred by the Prayers of the Prophets, and their Restoration hastned by the Intercessions of *Daniel*, and other Holy men. Were not the Almighty pacified and reconciled to us by such humble Supplications, how would the grievous Words, the Imprecations, Blasphemies and loud Defiances which are thrown out against Heaven every day, enflame the anger of God to whet his Sword, and bend his Bow, and pour out all sorts of Judgments upon a profligate Generation of men? But his *Mercy rejoyleth against Judgment*, and his ears are more open to the dutiful invocations of his own Children, than to the impious speeches of the Sons of *Belial*.

THIS power of humble Submission under the hand of God, was well understood by the King of *Nineveh*, when he heard that the Divine Decree was gone out against him and his People, and but forty days to the dreadful Execution of it. He sunk down from his Throne, tore off his Robe, covered himself with Sackcloth, and sate in Ashes, and caused his People to Fast and Pray,

and turn from their sinful Courses; whereby God was turned from the fierceness of his Anger, and did not execute his threatened Vengeance upon them.

AND what other Remedy is there left us, for the appeasing of God's Wrath when it burns against us? What did holy *Job* do, when his Children had gone about in a Course of Feasting at one another's Houses? He rose up early, and offered Burnt-offerings for them, to make an Atonement for any cursing or blasphemy which might possibly have proceeded out of their Mouths. Even so, when we have spent our days in Mirth and Jollity, and given a loose to our Tongues to say every Thing that may be thought pleasant and diverting, or that may sound forth our Anger and Revenge, or be most expressive of our Pride, Ambition, or any other exorbitant Lust, without any Regard to the Laws of God or Man; yet in the end we must come upon our Knees, and prostrate ourselves at the Foot-stool of the Divine Majesty, and be willing to address him with the most humble, self-abasing, self-denying Language, if we will atone for our proud, lewd, atheistical Discourses, and divert and dissipate that Tempest of God's Fury which they have stirred up.

2dly, THE Fury of a troubled Conscience is allayed by a soft Answer, *i. e.* by obviating the Terrors of God's Threatenings, with a just Display of his infinite Mercies. Every Sinner who has gone through various Scenes of Impiety, and loaded his Conscience with the Guilt of many habitual Vices, when he once awakes to a due Sense of his Condition, is often affrighted even to Distraction and Despair at the sight of it. He must needs apply to himself all the dreadful Threatenings of God to such Men, and imagine that the Divine Justice is going to arrest him every Mo-
ment,

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ment; and commit him to the *Worm which never dies; and the Fire which never shall be quenched*. Now while he is thus self-condemned, and unable to bear the Accusations of his own Conscience; how comfortable is it to him, if he meet with a spiritual Physician of a good Temper and sufficient Abilities, who knows how to handle the Wounds of his Soul gently; and to pour in the Oyl of the infinite Mercies and gracious Promises of God to repenting Sinners! who can largely display the Treasures of God's Love in Christ, and powerfully apply his Sacrifice as a full Satisfaction to the Divine Justice for the Sins of the whole World; and make despairing Sinners hear the blessed Voice of their Saviour calling unto them, and saying; *Come unto me all ye that travel and are heavy laden; and I will refresh you; for I came not to call the Righteous but Sinners to Repentance*.

SUCH merciful Answers as these to a wounded Soul which cries out for a Redeemer; rescue it from the Terrors of the Divine Justice; and the Clamours of its own upbraiding Sins; and encourage it to triumph in the Language of St. Paul; *Rom. viii. 33. Who shall lay any thing to the Charge of God's Elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh Intercession for us*:

But 3dly, THE Words of my Text, in their most obvious Sense, denote the Influence which an offending Servant's Carriage hath upon his offended Master. If the Offender, when he is reprov'd for his Fault, returns a mild; submissive and yielding Answer to his Master; he commonly allwages his Wrath, and prevents the farther Progress of it: but if he gives sawcy and contemptuous Language upon such occasions; as it is too common for such People to do, he exasperates his

Master's Passion, rendring his own Offence much more provoking than it was before.

A noble and celebrated Author of our own, ingeniously applies this Rule to the Conduct of any inferior Person, when his Superior, who has a just Authority over him, charges him with any Neglect or Misdeed. ' Two things, says he, *Solomon* ' advises in this Case. The one is, that an Answer be ' made: the other, that it be ingenuous. The first of ' which contains three Precepts. First, that the ' accountable Party beware of standing mute, in ' a profound and sullen Silence; which either ' charges the Fault wholly upon himself, or impeaches his Master of Injustice, as if his Ears ' were not open to a just Defence. 2dly, That he ' beware of delaying his Answer, or of craving ' longer time for his Defence; because this plainly ' betrays him, that he is devising some cunning ' and counterfeit Apology, instead of an honest, ' fair Answer, which might be made presently. ' But then 3dly, Let his Answer be very soft and ' temperate; not harsh or peremptory: for that ' will make the Business worse than if it had never ' been meddled with at all; and increase that ' Wrath which he should study to appease.

I cannot think of a Case wherein both parts of my Text are more notably illustrated, than in the Business between *David* and *Nabal*, 1 *Sam.* xxv. *David* and his Men, while they sojourned in the Wilderness of *Paran*, at a distance from *Saul*, had done many good Offices for *Nabal's* Herdsmen, and not only forbore to meddle with their Cattle, but likewise protected them from the Rapine of others. In confidence of these Obligations *David* sent to *Nabal* on his shearing-day, requesting him to give his young Men a portion of his good cheer. But *Nabal* answered the young Men churlishly, *Who is David? and who is the Son of Jesse? There be*

many

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many Servants now-a-days, who run away from their Masters. Shall I then take my Bread, and my Water, and my Flesh, that I have killed for my Shearers, and give it to Men, whom I know not whence they be?

THESE grievous Words so irritated *David* and his Soldiers, that they took their Arms, and would have vented their Wrath in the utter Destruction of *Nabal* and his Family; had not his Wife, who was of a quite different Spirit and Temper, immediately prepared a Present much larger than what would have sufficed at the first; and carried it to meet *David*, and presented it upon her Knees, begging pardon for the rudeness of her Husband, excusing herself, that she saw not his Messengers, giving the great Man his due Praise, and beseeching him to accept of the Blessing of her hand. By this humble and obliging Deportment, she not only gave a turn to his Anger, but gained so great a share of his Esteem and Affections, that upon the death of her churlish Husband, she became his Wife.

WE must confess that this ingenuous Submission does not always succeed so well, because it does not always meet with ingenuous and placable Minds on the other Side. There are some Spirits so rough and boisterous, that no degree of mild Application is able to mollify them, but like Oyl cast into the Fire, it farther enflames them. They are so fond of shewing their Power and Superiority over their Inferiors, so much in love with their own Dispositions and Humours, so resolved to pursue their own Designs to the uttermost, that nothing can inspire them with contrary Affections, not even their own Experience of parallel Cases, and Incidents in Life. This is well represented in that parable *Matt. xviii.* where a Servant who owed his Lord ten thousand Talents, was upon his humble Submission and Desire of Forbearance,

forgiven the whole Debt. But this great Deliverance could not dispose him *to go and do likewise*: for quickly after meeting with one of his fellow-servants, who owed him an hundred Pence, he could not be persuaded by all the Entreaties of this Debtor, to have the like Patience with him, but cast him into Prison, 'till he should pay the Debt.

THIS is a Demonstration that a soft Answer does not always turn away Wrath; the opposite Party may possibly be of such an untractable Nature, that nothing will satisfy him: And besides, the Offender is sometimes a meer Reprobate, who flatters and dissembles with his Tongue, while *his Heart within him is fully set to do Evil*. There are many such abandoned Wretches in the World, who are made up of nothing but fair Speeches and foul Practices; who are always promising good and doing evil. But it is the Glory of God and Man to convince such conceited Creatures of the Vanity and Folly of their Conduct, by turning a deaf Ear to their hypocritical Apologies, and making them smart soundly for their repeated Provocations and incorrigible Abuses. And therefore the Words of my Text are to be understood of such Cases where there are good Dispositions on both Sides; and it may be agreed to as an universal Truth, that *where one side unwillingly offends, and the other side is of a merciful and reconcileable Nature, there a soft Answer will turn away Wrath*.

SOME Commentators there are, who interpret my Text as a common Maxim of peaceable Conversation, teaching us to avoid all unnecessary Contentions, which spring from Pride, Ambition, Emulation, and a morose, wrathful, and splenatick Nature: a Nature which is always furnishing the Owner of it with ill Language, prompting him to return unbecoming Words, and inclining him
to

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to think, that it is more honourable to overcome his Antagonist by Sharpness and Bitterness, than by Lenity and Moderation. This Sense, as learned Men observe, may be well admitted: The *Hebrew* Word, which we translate *Answer*, signifying also what is first said; as in the Style of the New Testament we find, *Jesus answered*, and others answered, when indeed they first begun the Discourse. In which Sense, *he answered*, is no more than *he said*; and so by these Words *Solomon* cautions us, not only to take heed that we be not the Authors of Strife and Contention; but that whoever begins it, we should not continue it by provoking Replies; but endeavour to make an end presently by mollifying the Matter; and yield much for the sake of common Tranquillity.

HE that is desirous to live at Peace in the World, must consider that both himself and other Men have many Failings and Infirmities. He must consider, that in Matters of right and wrong, other People will take the Liberty to differ from his Opinion; and will sometimes contradict and thwart him, even when he has the clearest Truth and Reason of his side. He must expect often to meet with Pride, Self-love, and Confidence in others: he must not imagine that his own Conversation is always free from the Influence of such irregular Passions. Therefore he must resolve to bear Reproof and Opposition with Patience, because 'tis possible that he may deserve it; which if he does not, yet others who converse with him may think so; and he cannot presently enlighten their Understandings, or rectify their Mistakes; the best way therefore is to be easy under them, so long as no ill Consequence follows them. For what if another Man think worse of me than I deserve? It may be his Opinion may not weigh much with others; however it cannot make me

really worse than I am: but may stir me up to look inwardly, and discover something else at least that is amiss, and endeavour to mend it.

HE that would save himself and others much Trouble and Contention, must not be too apt to censure and find fault with things when they are tolerably well; he must not be over-forward to arraign Mens good Sense or Manners, for every Word or Action, which is not agreeable to his Relish. He must remember that his own Imperfections stand in need of Pardon, which he must be prepared to deserve of all others, by making them the like Allowances.

IT is excellent Advice which one of the ancient Philosophers gives upon this Head; *Tull. Off. B. 1. c. 38.* 'That in our Commerce and Dealings we make it our Business to be free from all violent Motions of the Soul, which reject and cast off their Allegiance to Reason. As on the one hand our Discourse should be pertinent, lively, and free from Stupidity; so on the other we should carefully refrain from falling into Transports of Passion, or any Words which are unfit for us to give, or others to hear. In all our Communications we should be very attentive to keep up a Sense of Humanity and Respect for those we converse with. It sometimes becomes necessary for us to expostulate with those who have done us ill Offices, or to reprehend those who have transgressed a plain Duty which they owed us: In the latter Case especially we may be allowed to raise our Voice a little above the common pitch, and to use some Severity of Expression. However let us take heed that we do not betray any Cruelty or Rancour of Mind; but come to such Corrections as to cutting and scarifying of Wounds, with a great deal of Unwillingness. And indeed we should never come to
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them at all, unless it be when no other Methods will do any good. And even then, when we are forced to it, we should be sure to avoid all Anger: for whatsoever is acted under the Impulse of this Passion, can never be regulated by any measures of Prudence or Reason. Our Rebukes of Offenders, (especially of such as are under our Direction and Authority) should be generally mild and gentle; but nevertheless such as should carry some weight along with them: observing a Mean between too great Easiness, and breaking out into angry and contumelious Speeches. And whatever Sharpness we may express in our Reproofs, we should let the Party so corrected, know, that we do it altogether for his good, and not for the Gratification of any of our own Humours. In the Contests which we have with our greatest Adversaries, whatever opprobrious Reflections they cast upon us, it will be our best way to keep our Minds calm and sedate, and free from the Ferment and Agitations of Anger, as knowing that while we are in such a Commotion, we can neither be consistent with the rules of Gravity, nor approved of those who shall behold our Infirmary.

Now this Philosophy is a very good Comment on the Words of my Text, and very agreeable with the Wisdom of Solomon, who in this same xvth chap. to look no farther, gives several other Counsels and Rules for the well ordering of our Discourse. *The Tongue of the wise useth Knowledge aright; but the mouth of Fools poureth out Foolishness.* Intimating, that in matters of Debate it is far from being the most commendable way to throw out all that a Man thinks or knows to the Disadvantage of his Adversary: though some are apt to value themselves upon this talking without Reserve, as a piece of Plain-dealing, and that they
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are no Dissemblers; but the royal Preacher condemns such a Practice, as contrary to the Laws of Society and Prudence. *The mouth of Fools poureth out Foolishness.* And this is in a manner repeated at ver. 28. *The Heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the Mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.* i. e. A Man that wishes the Peace and Prosperity of his Brethren, is not rash and hasty to speak of them; but considers and weighs his Words with Discretion, before he suffers them to pass the Door of his Lips: whereas those who are of an envious and malignant Spirit, are fond of picking up evil Reports, which they scatter abroad like Firebrands wherever they come, that they may raise Troubles and Combustions in the World.

AND thus much of the doctrinal part of my Text. The Practice of it is not every Man's Talent; the Weakness of our Minds, or the Warmth of our Tempers commonly making it a difficult Task. *David* himself was some Years in learning the due Observance of that short Lesson, which he imposed upon himself, *Psal. xxxix. I said I will take heed to my Ways, that I offend not with my Tongue.* *Solomon*, who inculcates it so frequently upon his Children, was doubtless observant of it himself. But his Son *Rehoboam* was no manner of Proficient in it; for when upon his Accession to the Throne of his Father, the Tribes of *Israel* addrest him for some Alleviation of the Taxes and Impositions which *Solomon* had laid upon them, he was so far from soothing their Grievance with a soft Answer, that in a menacing way he told them, *he would add Weight to their Yoke, and chastise them with Scorpions.* 1 *Kings xii.* Which hard Words provoked all the ten Tribes of *Israel* to revolt from him: For which the Son of *Syrach*, *Ecclesiasticus xlvii.* calls him *the Foolishness of the People*, and one that had no Understanding, because he

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lost the greatest part of his Kingdom by following the Advice of young, light, and vain Counsellors.

THUS grievous Words are inconsistent with good Policy: and they are no less contrary to true Religion, as the sacred Scripture abundantly teaches: but no where do we find them so strictly prohibited, as in the Gospel of Christ, who as he never spake unadvisedly with his Lips, so he calls upon all his Disciples to learn of him this Lesson of Meekness, assuring them *they shall be accountable for every evil Word at the last day*, and threatening the infernal Fire to him who shall outrage his Brother with his Tongue.

INDEED he will not allow any Professor of his Faith to render railing for railing to their greatest Enemies, but *when they curse you, says he, bless them, and pray for them when they despitefully use you and persecute you.* And his Apostles have numbered these Offences of the Tongue, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Envyings, Boastings, Blasphemies, in the Black-list of the Works of Darkness.

NOW since it is the Duty of all Christians to refrain from angry, spiteful, and indecent Language; it is more especially incumbent upon Children, Servants, and all that are in a state of Subjection, to be respectful and civil to those who have the Authority over them. It will generally be found for their Advantage to give soft Answers, when they are reproved or chastised for their Faults; for thus they will render the Reproofs and Chastisements the lighter. But if they should happen to have such over-indulgent Governours, as will suffer them to repine, and murmur, and insult, without giving them due Correction for it, let them not think themselves happy under this Lenity; for hereby they are but hardened in their disagreeable Manners, and rendred unfit for modest Conver-

Conversation, and become more obnoxious to the Displeasure of Almighty God, who has threatened *to deal frowardly with the froward, and to resist the proud, while he gives Grace to the humble.*

I wish all Children and Servants, who are arrived at years of Discretion, would seriously lay these things to Heart, and comply with those Rules of Meekness and Gentleness, which I am recommending to them. They would hereby deliver the World from infinite Broils, Animosities, and Contentions. For by discharging their Duty to their respective Governours, they would in their turn have dutiful Children and Servants of their own; for such is the Standard of Divine Justice, that *with what Measure they meet to others, it shall be measured to them again.* And so a Succession of orderly Families would be continued throughout all Generations. And then we need not enquire after the Spirit which would reign in larger Societies; for the particular Members being thus trained to Obedience at home, would practise it abroad, and keep to their respective Ranks and Stations, without Strife or Debate, like good Soldiers of Jesus Christ, who hath so strictly obliged us to be humble, and to prefer others before our selves, that he hath said, *He that will be greatest among you, let him be the least of all, and Servant to all the rest; even as the Son of Man came not to be ministred unto, but to minister, and to give his Life a Ransom for many.* To him with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.



SERMON



SERMON XLVIII.

On the Twenty-sixth Sunday after TRINITY.



PROVERBS xvii. 16.

Wherefore is there a Price in the hand of a Fool to get Wisdom, seeing he hath no Heart to it?



THE principal Points which Solomon treats of in this Book of *Proverbs*, are *Wisdom* and *Folly*, which he rightly considered as the great Fountains of the Happiness or Misery of Mankind: and therefore concluded, that he could write nothing so useful for us, as a set of short and clear Precepts, which were proper to furnish us with just Notions of *Wisdom*, and convince us how much it is for our Interest and Advantage to put them in Practice.

IN order to this he lays a good Foundation to build upon, assuring us, that *the Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom*; which is as much as to say, that whatever is contrary to the Maxims of Piety and Virtue, or to any of their respective Branches,

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branches; is but Folly, however it may put on the specious appearance and colours of Wisdom. By this determination he places to the account of Folly all fraudulent and artificial Dealings, all Uncleanliness; Gluttony; and Drunkenness, all omissions of honest Industry and Diligence in the affairs of Life; because however ingenious some men may seem to be, in gaining their ends of Riches and Pleasures, and gratifying their sensual Appetites by such means; yet these means being violations of that Sincerity and Truth, that Temperance and Chastity, those honest Endeavours and Pains which are all branches of Virtue; have consequently nothing at all of true Wisdom in them, but argue a false Judgment and want of Understanding in the Mind from whence they flow.

So that we may define *Wisdom* to be, *A right apprehension of those things which are best for us, and a diligent pursuit of them by such means as are agreeable to the Laws of Piety and Virtue.*

NOW the royal Preacher in the words of my Text observes, that men have sometimes Abilities and Opportunities to act wisely for themselves, but neglect them, and have no Heart to make their just Advantages of them. *There is a Price in the hand of a Fool to get Wisdom; but he hath no Heart to it.* We will consider what this Price is, or wherein the Means and Abilities to get Wisdom consist.

AND Iſt, A man of good natural faculties and endowments of Mind, may be said to have the Price of Wisdom in his hand, when he hath no Heart to it. This shows that by the word *Fool*, we are not to understand an Idiot, or Person void of common Sense; for the fault is charged upon his Heart, not upon his Head: It is not for want of a Capacity, but for want of a good will to Wisdom, that he continues to be a Fool. There

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is nothing more evident in experience than this, that many a man's rational Soul is like a piece of uncultivated ground, barren of every thing but weeds; whereas, were it duely improved, it might bring forth the best Fruit. Or we may compare him to a House, the Rooms whereof are well contrived, but have nothing but bare walls, no furniture to make them useful. The fittest representative of such People, is the *unprofitable Servant* in the Gospel, who received a Talent from his Lord, but wrapt it up in a Napkin, and let it lye without any improvement. He had this Price, this foundation of natural faculties to get Wisdom, but had no Heart to it.

2dly, THIS Price may be understood of the Schools of good Education and Learning. Those who are bred up in such places, how commonly do they act the part of Fools, and neglect to attain the knowledge of such useful Arts and Sciences as are taught there? The Child of tender years, how hard is he to be weaned from trifling amusements, and brought to turn his thoughts seriously to any valuable part of Learning! and when he grows up towards man, how apt is he to prefer the pleasures and exercises of the Body, above the improvements of the Mind! having much stronger propensions to Vice than Virtue, pursuing every thing more ardently than those studies which are enjoyn'd him; and pleasing himself in the enjoyment of his idle Company, that he is learning to know men, by which he gets the knowledge, and many times the impression of their corrupt ways and irregular passions, when he should be conversing with the works of more instructive Company and faithful Monitors, I mean the writings of wise and learned men. I confess, all learned Books do not fall under this Character. Too many there are which are full of Wit and void of Wisdom;
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and too many Students spend most of their time in the perusal of them, because the matter of them is most grateful to their corrupt taste and fancy. So that the Price to get Wisdom, their Opportunities which should be employ'd in learning that which should enable them to do good to themselves or others, are mis-spent in such studies as help to compleat their foolish and extravagant Humours. And this is the reason, that among the great number of men of Letters, there are so few who are really the wiser and better for what they have learned.

3dly, RICHES are in many respects the Price of Wisdom; in that they enable their Owners to buy Books, to hire Teachers, and to be at leisure to spend their time in the study of useful Learning. But how commonly do we see this Price also put into the hands of Fools? To say that rich men often neglect their Opportunities to improve their Knowledge and Virtue, is saying much too little; for indeed they too frequently abuse them to quite contrary purposes, committing all manner of folly and madness in the spending of their wealth. Many a man in all probability would have lived and died humble, sober, chaste, and temperate, had not his Riches exalted him above measure, and disposed him to hearken to Flatterers, who have persuaded him to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, and encouraged him to transgress the Laws of God and Men. It is the known character of Riches, that they easily grow the Idols of their possessors, and steal away their Hearts from the Love of God. And whereas our Lord observes, that if they are laid out in Pious and Charitable uses, they become a treasure in Heaven; on the contrary, he says, they often hinder men from entering into his Kingdom. St. James complains, that in his time the rich men
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of the World were most forward to oppress and persecute the poor Christians, *and blaspheme the holy name of Christ, by which they were called.* I wish there were not too much reason for the like complaint at this day. But it is too notorious that many rich People distinguish themselves from the meaner sort by a peculiar contempt of the Ordinances of Religion, affecting to be thought above the restraints of such Laws: *They are so proud that they care not for God, neither is God in all their thoughts.*

4thly, MEN in great Power and Authority have the Price of Wisdom in their hands. It is the happiness of all Princes, Judges, Magistrates and Ministers, above other men, that they have more opportunities of serving God, and procuring the welfare of their Brethren, by making and executing good Laws, by punishing Evil-doers, and rewarding those that do well, and maintaining the cause of Righteousness and Truth, against all Iniquity and Impiety. Nothing can be a greater Blessing to any place, than a good Governor, who makes it his business both to know and do those things, which advance the spiritual and temporal felicity of the People over whom he presides; under whose administration every Virtue flourishes, and Vices, like ill weeds, are continually rooted out and cast into the Fire. Such a conduct as this, is a greater Ornament to a Magistrate, than all the Riches and Honours which attend his station.

BUT alas! how few are there in Authority who are persuaded of this? How many aspire to the high place, and rejoice in it, more for the sake of their own private Interests and Gratifications, than out of any design to be real Patrons and Benefactors to the Community? who use their Power for an occasion of sinning without restraint, rather than for restraining Sin in others: And are

more concerned to preserve the Affections of wicked men, by sparing their beloved Lusts, than they are to please God, and recommend themselves to his favour, by executing his Laws impartially and without respect of Persons. What an infinite deal of good might be done among People by a righteous administration and discharge of all Offices! and what a very little is commonly done, by reason of the defects of such administrations! because the reins are in the hands of men who are Slaves to some Lust, and have not an Eye to the will of God, and a Heart to true Wisdom.

sibly, We have all a large Talent, a noble Price put into our hands to get Wisdom, in the Ordinances of Religion and means of Grace which we enjoy. Never was the Library of the most celebrated Academy of Philosophers so well furnished with Books, for the virtuous and happy conduct of Life in every condition and station of it, as is the Apartment of the meanest Christian, who is but owner of so much as a *Bible*; for that alone contains fuller instructions, and weightier arguments for good living, than all the grave Oracles of meer human Learning put together; so that every one of us may go to the fountain head as often as he pleases, and draw living water out of the wells of *Salvation*. Here he may be thoroughly instructed unto every good work, comforted in every Affliction, encouraged against every Fear, guided and directed in every Difficulty.

We need not seek after some remote and foreign Oracle to have our doubts resolved, as the *Gentiles* did of old, whose cost and pains was commonly rewarded with some dark, ambiguous Sentence, which did them more harm than good. How happy would they have thought themselves, had their opportunities of learning Wisdom been comparable to what we find in our Churches! where we
may

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may have daily Communion with God in the spiritual Sacrifice of Prayers and Praises, and turn our thoughts to the contemplation of his heavenly Kingdom, and feed our Souls with that immortal Food which nourishes them to everlasting Life.

THESE advantages are the portion of every Christian; the meanest of us may *come freely, and drink* of these streams of heavenly Wisdom *without money, and without price*: Which is such a Provision for the instruction of the Poor, as was never known before the preaching of the Gospel. The Schools of the Philosophers had no such Treasures of Knowledge to communicate, nor any way to make their Doctrines so universally known, for the edification of all ranks and conditions of People.

BUT now it is too visible in our daily Experience, that these opportunities of acquiring divine Wisdom, and growing in the Knowledge, Grace, and Favour of God, are for the most part in the hands of Fools, who have no Heart to make use of them.

1st, THIS appears in the want of that Zeal which should bring People to the Assemblies of God's publick Worship, and inspire them with a serious Devotion in all the Duties of this place. At those hours which are set apart only for Prayers, how small is the number of Worshippers, in comparison of those negligent ones who might find leisure to attend them; were their sense of the Duty but equal to the importance of it. At these more solemn Assemblies how rarely do many appear, who have little or no impediment to hinder them? And how many formal and superficial Hearers are there, who are unprofitable under the means of Grace, because they perform not the Duties they are about, with a suitable Devotion and Attention of Heart and Mind? So that in effect their opportunities and sea-

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sions of Grace are lost, for want of a just improvement.

2dly, WE are convicted of a stupid neglect of our Christian Talent, by the errors and vices of our common Conversation. Every Christian who accustoms himself to profane Swearing and Cursing, or to Calumny and Detraction, or to Atheistical, wanton, unfavoury Discourse, is a Fool; because he knows, or ought to know, that the Laws of his Religion forbid such abuses of Speech, which render him obnoxious to the condemnation of God at the last Day. And it is not only pious and honourable, but very easie and practicable for him to govern his Tongue by the rules which Christ has enjoined him.

FARTHER, Our blessed Lord assures us, that whatever we bestow in works of Piety and Charity, is so much Treasure laid up in Heaven. The Man then who pretends to the Faith and Hope of a Christian, must act very impolitickly, whenever he withholds and refuses to contribute something of his Substance, in proportion to his Circumstances, upon such occasions. And yet what multitudes are there, *who have a price in their hands*, sufficient Abilities, *to purchase the heavenly Treasure*, but are so far from seeking the opportunities of it, that they studiously avoid them, and turn a deaf Ear to the most reasonable and moving Sollicitations, as if there were no Precepts of brotherly love in the Gospel which they profess, no Promise that they shall be rewarded for all which they expend upon Christ and his distressed Servants; but that they were only so far rich and wealthy, as they laid up treasure for themselves and their Posterity in this present Life.

3dly, WE many times condemn our own mismanagement of the Talents which God has given us, and look back with much regret upon those opportunities

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opportunities which have slip'd through our hands, whereby we might have entred into a nearer Communion with God, and a happier course of holy and virtuous living; whereby we might have prevented a great deal of work for Repentance, and have obtained a more comfortable Prospect, and surer hope of our Inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. These regrets are apt to affect us more especially, when we are well advanced in Years, and begin to come upon the brink of our Passage out of this World into another. When we grow weary of the concerns of this Life, and can take but little pleasure in the enjoyments of it, then our Minds are most free from the prejudices of carnal Lusts, and we are best qualified to make a true judgment of our ways, wherein we have erred, and what we have neglected of those things which are a foundation of sure and everlasting Comfort. And upon the whole we rest in the wise Man's Conclusion, that *to fear God and keep his Commandments, is the best thing we can do for our selves.* But this, alas! is seldom the resolution of our younger, more vigorous Years. While our sensual Passions are warm and busie within us, we are too apt to hearken to them, *to walk in the ways of our Heart, and in the sight of our Eyes,* and do those things which will create us melancholy resentments at the last, and foolishly squander away those good Days which can never be recalled, wherein we should have applied our Hearts unto Wisdom.

AND thus we have seen the principal Cases, wherein God puts it into our power to improve the faculties of our own Souls, and to propagate Religion and Virtue amongst others; and we find by experience the truth of the Remark in my Text, that the Power is often given without the Will, and that we suffer our opportunities to pass away

and be lost, without improving them to any good purpose.

NOW, says the royal Preacher, *wherefore is such a price in the hand of a Fool, who has not a Heart to lay it out to the best advantage?* This Question may concern the Conduct of divine Providence; for it may import thus much: Why has God bestowed his Talents upon those Men, who pervert the design of them, and instead of doing good with them, abuse them to their own and others detriment?

IN answering this Question, we must take heed that we charge not the Providence of God with Folly; but rather humbly confess, that his Dispensations are in many respects unsearchable, and surpass the limits of our Understanding to find out the ground and reason of them. However, it is no offence in us to guess at them, and assign such reasons as we think most probable and agreeable to the divine Attributes: As

Ist, THE Talents which we receive from God, are his free Gifts, and cannot of right be claimed or demanded by any of his Creatures. For we are all in his Hands, as the Clay in the hand of the Potter; *he may make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour*, as he sees fit. So that while we think he dispenses his Benefits unequally, giving much to his Enemies, and little to his own Children, yet we cannot, upon this principle, say, that he does any Man wrong, because he is no Man's Debtor, and consequently we must acquit him of any Injustice in all his Dispensations.

BUT though it be agreeable to Justice, yet we are apt to think it is inconsistent with Goodness, that ill Men should be possess of those Talents, which might have redounded to the great benefit of Mankind, if they had been put into other hands. And indeed we blame Men for this conduct; I mean,
for

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for employing those under them who, they know, will abuse their trust. But we shall be mistaken, and run into a thousand Errors, if we measure the divine Goodness by the same rule. For at this rate we may ask, why did God, who created Man upright and immortal, suffer him to fall, and to bring Sin and Death, with all their train of Calamities, into the World? since by the interposal of his Almighty Power he could have hindred this. But then we must imagine him to have made Man a quite different Creature from what he now is, and to have given him quite other Laws from the beginning, than those which are laid down in Sacred Writ: Whereas we find that he has always created us as free Agents, bestowing his Gifts upon us, and propounding to us the best arguments to persuade us to use them well; but still leaving our Will at liberty to act otherwise, if we will not hearken to him. And this, I think, is the best answer whereby we may vindicate the Goodness of God in his Dispositions. He commits his Talents to such Stewards as might make a right use of them; but they for the most part abuse their trust, because their Will is contrary to the Will of their Lord. And if these were put out of their Stewardship, and others, whom we think well of, were placed in their Room and Circumstances, yet we cannot be sure that they would discharge their trust to better purpose; but might justly fear the contrary; it being often seen, that Men are not the same in different Fortunes, and that those who promised well in a private quiet Life, make a very untoward Figure, when called to sustain any weighty Employment.

But now let us suppose that a sufficient number of such wise and faithful Stewards could be found, as would effectually dispense all the manifold Gifts of God to the benefit of Mankind; if any one ask,

why they are not called of God to such Administrations; I answer, Because the World is not worthy of them.

THIS has been tried and found in all Countries, that the best Magistrates and Ministers have not been able to reform a profligate People; nor have charitable Works always been applied according to the Will of the Donors, but have often been swallowed up by the Sons of Rapine and Violence, or abused by the Receivers to the pampering of Lust and Laziness.

So that we have no reason to arraign the Goodness of God, for lodging his Talents in the Hands of those who make no proper use of them: It is even a Mercy that People should be denied them, and not have them to answer for, except they were surer than they commonly are, to take no harm in the enjoyment of them.

2dly, THIS Question, *Why is there a price in the hand of a Fool, who has no Heart to it,* may concern the Possessor, and be thus interpreted, What will be the Issue and Consequence of such an abuse at the last? And the answer is, That it will redound to the greater Condemnation of the unworthy Receiver at the last Day; according to the equitable rule of the Gospel, that *to whom much is given, of him shall much be required*; and if he shall be found to have abused his large Talents, and neglected the abilities and opportunities which God put into his Hands to set forward his own and others eternal Welfare, his Punishment will be aggravated in proportion to such Neglects and Omissions. For God, the Judge of all, will then render to every Man, not only according to his Works, but likewise according to his Sloth and Unprofitableness, and Contempt of those Duties which he ought to have done, but left undone.

THIS

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THIS should awaken us all to a serious Examination of our selves, to see what Talents our great Lord has bestowed upon us, and what Use we have made of them. And if it shall appear that we have hitherto been such Fools as to neglect the proper application of the Price put into our Hands, let this reproof of the wise Man in my Text enter deep into our Hearts, and excite us to redeem the mis-spent time and lost opportunities of our former Life, by imploying the remainder of it with double Care and Diligence, in all those good Duties which God shall enable us to do; that whenever he shall call us to give an account of our Stewardship, our Accounts may be ready, our Work finished, and we may receive of our Lord the reward of those who have approved themselves wise and faithful Servants; through the Merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom &c.



SERMON



SERMON XLIX.

On the First Sunday in ADVENT.



ISAIAH. II.

To what purpose is the multitude of your Sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? I am full of the Burnt-offerings of Rams, and the Fat of fed Beasts, and I delight not in the Blood of Bullocks, or of Lambs, or of He-Goats.

HE time of this Prophecy is denoted by the names of four Kings in the first Verse, viz. Uzziab, Jotham, Abaz, and Hezekiab, Kings of Judah; of whom the third reigned at that time when *Israel* was carried away captive by *Salmaneser* King of *Assyria*, and the fourth had notice given him by this very Prophet of the approaching Captivity of *Judah* by the *Babylonians*, which came to pass about one hundred and thirty Years after.

THE Author of it is thus accounted for by the *Jerish* Doctors, and ancient Christian Writers, that

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that he was of the royal Family, his Father *Amos* being a younger Brother of *Amaziah* King of *Judah*; that therefore, having had a princely Education, his Style is most refined, and his Conceptions strong and lofty above others: That his Subject is very copious, comprehending *Gentiles* as well as *Jews*; so that there is scarce any thing to be found in other Prophets, which is not well treated of by him. That he hath prophesied of Christ and his Church so particularly, that his Discourse looks more like a History of Things past, than a Prediction of that which was to come. *St. Jerom*, who had often read him and considered him very carefully, says, *he deserves the Name of an Evangelist rather than of a Prophet*; and indeed he is oftener quoted throughout the New Testament, than any one of the rest of the Prophets. By Passages out of him the Gospels are so enlightened, that the evangelical Expositors must understand *Isaiah*, and the Interpreters of *Isaiah* must understand the Gospels at the same time. For he tells how Christ should be born of a pure Virgin, should be sought out, and adored by the wise Men of the *Gentiles*; and our Lord's preaching, working of Miracles, Passion, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and coming to Judgment at the last day, are not so much recited by him in Words, as drawn to the Life in a very exact Picture; so that his Prophecy deserves in a special manner that Title of a *Vision* which he gives it. He is full, not only of the prophetick, but apostolick Spirit, and we might venture to call his Discourse, *the Gospel according to Isaiah*.

FOR this reason it is, that this Book, by ancient and immemorial Custom, is appointed to be read in our Churches at this Season of the Year, as being the best Preparative for the *Advent* of our Lord, the Foundation of the Evangelists and Apostles,

poſſes, the Pourtraiture of the Nature, Perſon, and Offices of the Meſſiah, and of the great things which he hath done and ſuffered for us.

FINALLY, this Prophet is ſaid to have enjoyed a long Life, even the Space of one hundred and twenty ſix Years, as he well might, living four Kings Reigns, and part of a fifth, I mean that of *Manaſſes* Son of *Hezekiah*, under whom he ſuffered Martyrdom, being ſawn aſunder, according to the conſtant Tradition of the *Jewiſh* Rabbins; to which *St. Paul* is by the unanimous Conſent of Interpreters ſuppoſed to allude, *Heb. xi. 37.* where mentioning the various Deaths of the ancient Saints of God, he ſays, *they were ſtoned, they were ſawn aſunder, &c.* *Tertullian* interprets the firſt of *Jeremiah*, and the ſecond of *Iſaiah*, and *St. Jerom* ſays, the truth of this is not to be queſtioned: Whence the *Roman* Martyrology has this Note on the 6th of *July*: *This Day the holy Prophet Iſaias was martyred by a Saw, at the Command of King Manaſſes.* And the *Chronicle of Alexandria* has the like Record, with this Addition, that he ſuffered after he had propheſied ninety Years, and was buried under an Oak in *Rogelim*.

CORNELIUS à Lapide, in his Commentary on this Prophet, has repreſented his Effigies at length in an elegant Sculpture. And in the corner of the Table there is his Figure again in miniature, with two Men holding a Saw over him: This the Author ſays he copied from an antient fair Book in the *Vatican* Library, which formerly belonged to *Baſilius Porphyrogennetus* Emperor of *Conſtantinople*, while it was Chriſtian, in the tenth Century. And this I mention to ſhow that the *Greek* and *Latin* Churches have conſtantly held this Opinion concerning the death of this Prophet.

Now that which provoked King *Manaſſes* and his wicked Miniſtry to inflict this horrible Death upon

upon *Isaiah*, was undoubtedly the Prophet's free and impartial Reproof of them, which galling their guilty Consciences, enraged them with mortal Hatred against him. This Generation had filled up the measure of their Fathers Iniquities (as we learn from the History of those Times) 2 *Kings* xxi. and 2 *Chron.* xxxiii. where it is said, that *Manasseh* set up the Idols which his Father *Hezekiah* had thrown down, and worshipped the whole Host of Heaven, and did according to all the Abominations of the Heathen. And whereas his Predecessors had kept their Idols at a distance, in high Places and Groves, he brought them into the very Temple of God, which had been so religiously dedicated by King *Solomon* to his Presence and Worship. Moreover he caused his Children to pass through the Fire to *Molech*; and used Enchantments, and dealt with familiar Spirits and Wizards; and filled *Jerusalem* with innocent Blood, which he shed in it, from one end to another. And to sum up all, both King and People added Hardness of Heart, and Contempt of God's Word and Commandments, to the rest of their Provocations. For it is particularly noted, that *the Lord spake to them, but they would not hearken.*

UPON all these Enormities the Prophet animadverts in this very first Chapter of his Prophecy. He upbraids their Insensibility of the Divine Blessings, with the Example of *the Ox who knows his Owner, and the Ass his Master's Crib.* He taxes them with such a desperate Spirit, as grew more mischievous under Corrections. He calls them *Rulers of Sodom, and People of Gomorrah*; and the History of their Manners justifies this Appellation. He tells them, *their Hands were full of Blood*, and we have seen what reason he had to tell them so. Lastly, he reproves them for their Hypocrisy and Partiality in Religion. *To what purpose is the multitude of your Sacrifices unto me,*
saith

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said the Lord. I am full of the Burnt-offerings of Rams, and the Fat of fed Beasts; I delight not in the Blood of Bullocks, or of Lambs, or of He-Goats.

Which words are not to be understood absolutely, but comparatively, and with respect to the Manners of these Men.

For 1st, God could not absolutely reject Sacrifices, because they were of his own appointing, as we are abundantly certified in the Books of *Exodus* and *Leviticus*. And they were instituted for very good Purposes: 1st, As federal Rites between God and this People, that by eating of what was offered upon his Altar, they might profess their Union and Communion with him, that they were of his Family, he their Father, and they his Children. And this is what made Idolatry so odious to him, and for which he declares himself a jealous God, that when they sacrificed to Idols, they made the same Acknowledgments to them.

2^{dly}, SACRIFICES were instituted to expiate Sins of Ignorance, and Trespasses of an inferior nature. For as to Sins committed presumptuously, and out of Defiance to the Divine Majesty, and Contempt of the established Laws, the Offender was not within the compass of such Propitiations, but was doomed to suffer Death without Mercy. But for Sins of Inadvertence and daily Incurſion, such as Men generally pious and endued with the Love of God and their Neighbour might be surprized with, the Divine Legislator was pleased to accept of these Sacrifices for an Attonement. It is true, St. Paul in his Epistle to the *Hebrews* affirms, that it was impossible that the Blood of Bulls and Goats should purify the Conscience, so as to wash away the Guilt of Sin, which only can be atoned for by the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. But yet they availed to the purifying of the Flesh, and were accepted of
God

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God in lieu of temporal Punishments. So that they might be properly styled a Propitiation.

3dly, SACRIFICES were designed to teach Men, that without shedding of Blood there could be no Remission of Sins. They were hereby led to consider, that infinite Justice properly required the Life of the Offender, but that infinite Mercy accepted of a vicarious Life, the Beast's instead of the Man's. The Sinner was hereby admonished of the true Demerits of his Offences, and advised to take heed of repeating his Transgressions, lest a worse thing should happen to him.

4thly, PEACE-OFFERINGS, or Sacrifices of Gratitude were offered to God, in hope of obtaining some Favour, or as a Thanksgiving for having received some signal Mercy from him. The first sort were called *Salutary*, the second *Archaishtical*. Besides these for publick Festivals, there were some also of a private nature, devoted to God either by a Vow, to obtain some Blessing; or else voluntary, to return Thanks for Favours received. The first were of indispensable Obligation; in the latter, Men were left more to their liberty. There are in Scripture numberless Instances of these two sorts of Sacrifices. Among the Peace-offerings we may rank that of the Paschal Lamb; and that of the First-born, whether Man or Beast. The First-born of Male Children were offered to God, as a Memorial of his having spared the First-born of their Fore-fathers in the Land of Egypt; but they were redeemed with Money, and the price of their Redemption given to the High-Priest. The Tythes of Herds and Flocks were also consecrated to God, as a Thanksgiving for his having blessed the Cattel.

LASTLY, Sacrifices were instituted for Types and Representatives of that final Sacrifice of the Son of God, in whom they all centred and were

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consummated. Who therefore is introduced in the fortieth Psalm, thus speaking to his heavenly Father. *Sacrifice and Offering thou wouldst not; but a Body hast thou prepared for me: in Burnt-offerings and Sacrifice for Sin thou hast had no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I come to do thy Will, O God.* St. Paul, in commenting on these Words, *Heb. x.* says, *he takes away the first, i. e. the legal Offerings, that he might establish the second, i. e. the Sacrifice of himself, and consequently he calls the Law our Schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ; and Christ the End of the Law, because it was ended in him and by him.* In this Sense it is, that our Lord affirms, *he came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them.* He fulfilled the moral Law by his perfect Holiness and Virtue, and the ceremonial Law by his Death and Passion.

FROM all this I infer, what I asserted before, That God does not reject Sacrifices as such; for he ordained them by his own Authority, for excellent Ends, as I have sufficiently made it appear. And therefore we must conclude, in the

II^d place, THAT his Aversion to them was occasioned by the ill Manners of those that offered them, who had no Concern to accomplish the good Ends which were intended by them, nor considered that by these Sacraments they laid themselves under renewed Obligations to be sensible of their own Demerits, to repent and reform whatever they found amiss in their Lives, and to abound in the Love of God, and the Fruits of his holy Spirit. It appears from the Characters of these Men, especially in their latter and worst Times, that they satisfied themselves with the *opus operatum*, the external Duties of Religion; and had no Regard to the Renovation of their Hearts and Minds. I doubt not but *Hezekiah* and *Josiah*, who endeavoured to reform them, were Princes of very sincere

sincere and spiritual Piety, and they did very well in restoring the external Forms of God's Worship, from the Superstition and Idolatry which had overrun it. Which was the utmost they could do. For they could not change the Hearts and Affections of Men, which I am afraid were generally alienated from God and Goodness, after all that these pious Kings had done for them. You have heard what a Character *Isaiah*, who saw *Hezekiah's* Reformation, gives of their Morals in this Chapter, and afterwards he calls them a *People who drew nigh to God with their Mouth, and honoured him with their Lips, while their Heart was far from him.* So that it is plain, that instead of answering the end of their Sacrifices, which should have led them to the Love of God, and the Imitation of his Holiness, they hoped to appease him, and compound with him for a profane, profligate Life, by abounding in these kind of Offerings, which was indeed directly to cross the true Design and Meaning of them.

THIS is what provoked God to declare, that he nauseated those Sacrifices which were offered him by such vile Hands and impure Hearts. For though they were of his own Institution, yet he takes all Opportunities to assure us, that he prefers inward Holiness, and Works of Piety and Charity far above them, as being the End, for the Attainment of which he had appointed these Ways and Means. And therefore *Moses*, their great Director in Sacrifices, assures them *Deut. x. 12. that God required nothing of them in comparison of this, that they should fear him, serve him, and love him, with all their Heart, and with all their Soul.*

AGAIN, we hear that when King *Saul*, contrary to the Divine Command, had spared the best of the Flocks and Herds of the *Amalekites*, as a rich Offering for God, *Samuel* affirms to him, that

his Obedience had been much more acceptable than his Sacrifice, and his hearkening to God's Word sweeter than the fat of Rams.

AND his Successor King David, when he had committed those grievous Sins in the case of Uriah, penitently acknowledges, that he would have offered any Sacrifice, if God had required it, but that he knew he delighted not in Burnt-offerings. The Sacrifice of God, says he, is a troubled Spirit, a broken and a contrite Heart he will not despise.

LIKEWISE Asaph, the Author of the fiftieth Psalm, who perhaps lived in David's time, introduces God as sitting in Judgment upon Israel, and willing to pass over the Omissions of Sacrifice, but very much insisting on Prayers and Thanksgivings. I will not reprove thee, says he, for thy Sacrifices, or complain that thy Burnt-offerings were not always before me. But offer unto God Thanksgiving, and pay thy Vows unto the most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; so will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise me.

To proceed; Solomon in his Proverbs tells us more than once, that the Sacrifice of the Wicked is Abomination to the Lord. Jeremiah chap. vii. says, That God gave his People Precepts of Obedience, before he commanded any thing about Sacrifice and Burnt-offerings. Amos chap. v. 22. certifies the Hypocrites from the Mouth of God, that he despised their Sacrifices, and would have no regard to the Peace-offerings of their fat Beasts. Micah declares, that to do justly, and love Mercy, and walk humbly with God, is more pleasing to him than thousands of Rams, and ten thousand Rivers of Oyl.

AND thus, in going over Moses and the Prophets, we plainly see that the spiritual and moral part of the Law, makes far greater weight in the Balance of God's Sanctuary, than the Rituals of it. The spiritual Part may subsist and live with-

without Externals; but Externals are but a Phantom or dead Carcase without the Spiritual. That Devotion is certainly best, where they are conveniently joyned; and we may say of them as our blessed Lord said of a Case very much like this, *that while we are doing that which is the most essential part, we should not leave the other undone.* We know where Rites and Ceremonies are so multiplied, that they even choke the Spirit of Religion; but when they are so moderate in their number, and so well adapted in their use, that they adorn and enliven the Worship of God, they are then not only allowable, but very valuable and desirable.

We have indeed in my Text, and in many other Sayings of the Prophets, such an Idea given us of *Jewish* Sacrifices, as if they were really abominable to God; which in their Nature I have shown they could not be: and by the divine Institution they were made a Duty. But I suspect that the *Jews* by their own voluntary Additions had over-multiplied the Number of them, or some way corrupted them. I am sure they placed too much Confidence in them, and so by their abuse rendred them distasteful to God, as having made them Hindrances rather than Helps to true Piety, and so quite perverted his Design in them.

By their Example let us be admonished to worship God in Spirit and in Truth; while we observe that there is no Institution of Religion, but what may be so corrupted both in Doctrine and Discipline, as to become unworthy of the Divine Majesty, and fit to be abolished. The Religion of the *Jews* was of such divine Original, that it could not but be most acceptable to God the Author of it, and justly demanded high Veneration from all its Worshippers. But when they came to prefer a superficial Zeal above sanctified Affections and

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works of Piety and Charity; when they held it a main part of Devotion to cry out, *The Temple of the Lord*; when they prophaned their Temple with Idols, and offered their Sacrifices with lewd Hearts and Hands imbrued in innocent Blood, as the Prophet here taxes them, then the Divine Presence and Power forsook them, and left their Temple and Altar, as fit for nothing but the Fire of the *Babylonians*. The like Preparatives made way for the Ruin of their second Temple. It stood near four hundred Years in a peaceable and prosperous Condition. But when they polluted it, by making a Market in it of those very Creatures which were to be sacrificed on its Altar; when they turned it into a Garrison in their civil Dissensions, and shed the Blood of their Brethren in the midst of it; when they delivered up the Lord of it to the Power of the *Romans*, in order to preserve it out of their Hands; it remained then *to be purged by Fire*: the judgment of any intelligent Man would have censured it, as utterly unfit, after so many horrid Prophanations, for any farther Service of a holy God.

AND if hence we descend to the Christian Churches in the *East*, we shall find them laid in Ruins by the Sins of the Worshipers. *Arianism*, *Nestorianism*, *Eutychianism*, and I know not how many Heresies under other Denominations, had quite eaten out the Heart of genuine Christianity. Jesus Christ was lost in the Number of fictitious Mediators, whose Images had filled every Corner of their Churches. The Sacraments were so disguised and clogged by additional Matter, that they could not have been known by the Evangelists and Apostles. And this Corruption of Faith was parallel'd by a Dissolution of Manners, and the Christian was become destitute even of Humanity, and grown more brutish than the Infidel.

All

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All which, by the just Judgment of God, ended in the superiority of the *Saracens*, and the prevalence of the *Turkish* Mosques over the Churches unworthy of Christ.

THESE examples, I say, should be a Warning to us, if we have any esteem for our Christian Religion, to persuade us to hold fast the profession of our Faith as it was at first delivered to us; to confess our Lord before men, to be that Son of God, whom his own Doctrine, and the consent of his Apostles affirm him to be; and to deny all Ungodliness and worldly Lust, and order our Conversation as becomes the Gospel of Christ.

Finally, LET us praise God for shewing us those things which many Kings and Prophets of old have desired to see, even the Kingdom of his dear Son, whereof he hath made us living Members, and by him delivered us from the Guilt and Punishment of those Sins, which we could not be freed from by the Law of *Moses*. Let us praise him, that he hath redeemed us from those tedious Ceremonies, and costly Sacrifices, which the wisest of the *Jews* complained were a burden, that neither they nor their Fathers were able to bear. Above all, let us magnifie his infinite goodness, for promising to appear a second time to compleat our Salvation, by raising us out of our Graves, and fashioning our Bodies like to his own glorious Body, and exalting us unto those celestial Mansions which he is now preparing for us, and where we shall ever live with him, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.





SERMON L.

On the Second Sunday in ADVENT.



ISAIAH v. 1, 2.

Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my well-beloved touching his Vineyard: my well-beloved hath a Vineyard in a very fruitful Hill. And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest Vine, and built a Tower in the midst of it, and also made a Winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth Grapes, and it brought forth wild Grapes.



HERETO the Prophet had framed his discourse to the People in a proper, plain, and familiar style; now he changes it into parable and allegory; though he doth not keep them long in suspense, nor leaves them to guess at the Moral of it. For he fairly unriddles it at the seventh verse: *The Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts, says he, is the House of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant Plant: and he looked for Judgment, but behold Oppression; for Righteousness, but behold a Cry.*

THE main design of this Parable then is, to reprove that generation of men to whom it was spoken

spoken, for their unfruitfulness under the best means of divine Grace. But though this main design is very clear, yet there are several things in the words of my Text which require farther Explanation; which I will endeavour in order to.

And 1st, It is natural to ask, Who is this that says, *I will sing a song, or utter a Parable composed as a Song, or pleasant narrative, to my Beloved?* I take these words to be spoken, not in the Person of *Isaiah*, but of God the Father to his Son our Lord, who in the Evangelical style is called, *the beloved Son of God, in whom he is well pleased.* But how can the Church of those times be called *the Vineyard of the Son?* I answer, Because as the Father created all things by him, so by him he has always governed all things, and more especially his Church. Whereunto agrees that of *St. Paul*, *That Christ accompanied the Israelites in the Wilderness*; and that of *St. Peter*, *that the Spirit of Christ spake by the Prophets.* As to the Name, it is indeed ascribed to him in these Sayings, by way of Prolepsis or Anticipation: For properly speaking, he was not *the Christ*, till he appeared in our Nature, and executed the Office of the *Messiah*. But in his divine capacity, as he is the eternal Son of the Father, he presides over all things, *God blessed for evermore*, as *St. Paul* speaks, and has always had the peculiar care and conduct of the Patriarchs and chosen People of God.

WHETHER this Doctrine agree with the Sentiments which later Jews have entertained of the *Messiah*, I am not at present concerned to enquire. It is sufficient for us that it was the persuasion of the best of the Jews in the Apostles days, as we have proved from the two chief of them, *St. Peter* and *St. Paul*. In which they were so much followed by the primitive Christian Fathers, that their writings are full of this Doctrine, that the

Laws and Ordinances of the *Jewish Church* were given to *Moses by the hand of this Mediator*. Upon this account no doubt it was, That *Malachi* styles him *the Lord of the Temple* four hundred years before his Incarnation, and this dominion we find him asserting over it, by driving with a miraculous force the prophane Hucksters out of it.

ACCORDING to these Authorities we may with good Sense allow the *Jewish Church* to be called here in my Text *the Vineyard of the Son of God*; and this without the Absurdity of confounding the Mosaick and the Christian Dispensations together: for nothing is properly Christian but what was established by the Son of God after his Incarnation, whereby he became *Christ* or the *Messiah*.

2dly, THE Church of God is styled a *Vineyard*, which is a very pertinent resemblance of it. For as a Vineyard is a plot of ground separated from common field and pasture, in order to be improved with such cultivation, as that the Vines and Grapes it produces may supply the Owner with generous Wines: So God's Church consists of a People selected and chosen by him out of the rest of the World, that they may worship him by the Laws and Rules of his own revealing, and so exercise a purer Religion, and abound in the Fruits of good living, above other men, who have not the light of the same Revelation, nor direction of the same Laws.

THIS similitude of a Vine, or Vineyard, for the justness of the resemblance, is several times used to denote the Church. *Thou hast brought a Vine out of Egypt*, says the Author of *Psal. 80*, which was writ in the same Age with this of *Isaiab*, *thou hast cast out the Heathen and planted it. Thou madest room for it, and when it had taken root, it filled the Land. The Hills were covered with the shadow*

of it; and the boughs thereof were like the goodly Cedar trees. She stretched out her branches unto the Sea, the Mediterranean, and her boughs unto the River [Euphrates.] All which is an Allegory, intimating that God delivered *Israel* out of *Egypt*, and planted them in *Canaan* to serve him. Thus our blessed Saviour compares the Kingdom of God, *i. e.* the Church, to a Vineyard, into which he the Owner sent Labourers, *i. e.* Ministers, to cultivate it, *i. e.* to improve the Piety and Virtue of the People by their Ministry.

Now if any curious Enquirer shall think fit to demand, why God chose such a small pittance of the Earth as *Canaan*, for his Spiritual Vineyard, the lot of his Inheritance, where only he communicated the knowledge of himself; I need only answer to the fact, That so it was, and infer from thence, that it was just and right. I confess this is contrary to a Maxim in our Schools, where it is held a wrong way of arguing, that because a thing is or has been done, therefore it may be lawfully done. But this can only prescribe to human actions; for in the divine Oeconomy 'tis good Logick to say, This God hath done, therefore 'tis just; because *the Judge of all the Earth must needs do that which is right.*

AND that he was known in *Jewry*, and made his name great in *Israel*; that he confined his Tabernacle to *Salem* and his Temple to *Sion*, where alone he could be acceptably worshipped, is so plainly and frequently asserted in Holy Scripture, that it cannot be unknown to those who peruse it.

AND if the Patrons of natural Religion will say, that other Nations which were not of God's Vineyard, served him acceptably in following the best light they had, they say that which is a flat contradiction to the whole current of Sacred Writ: and if they call it Partiality thus to prefer one People

ple before another, they calumniate the Justice of God, whose Revelation of himself to fallen man is a matter of meer Grace and Favour, and not any thing which he is obliged or bound to do for us. To Abraham and his Seed indeed he had promised it, and by virtue of his Promise was bound to perform it.

zally, This Vineyard is said to be situate in a very fruitful Hill, alluding to the Land of Canaan, which was a high-raised, and a very fertile Soil: agreeable to the character which Moses gives of it, Deut. xxxiii. 13. The Lord, says he, made Israel to ride upon the High places of the Earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields, and he made him to suck Honey out of the Rock, and Oyl out of the flinty Rock: Butter of Kine, and Milk of Sheep, with fat of Lambs, and Rams of the breed of Bashan, and Goats with the fat of kidneys of wheat, and thou didst drink the pure blood of the Grape. The same Moses commonly calls it a Land flowing with Milk and Honey, and the Crown and Glory of all Lands. St. Basil mentions it as a very ancient Tradition, that Adam, after he was cast out of Paradise, chose to live in this Countrey, as that which came nearest to his former state of Happiness. And Gen. xiii. when Abraham offered to Lot the choice of his Pasture in this Countrey, it is said that Lot lift up his Eyes and beheld all the Plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, even as the Garden or Paradise of God. For this we have the concurring Testimonies of Greek and Roman Historians, when they write of Syria and Mesopotamia; and modern Travellers report, that even in its present state, under the Turks Government, who commonly carry Ruin and Desolation where-ever they go, the Fruits of Palestine are very plentiful, and of excellent taste and spirit. These are the reasons which the Prophet had to say, as he does in my

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Text, that the Vineyard was placed on a very fruitful Hill.

4thly, GOD made a Fence round about it: i. e. he distinguished his People from all other Nations by peculiar Laws, Statutes, and Observances, not only in Religion, but even in civil Life, in their very Diet and Conversation, so that it was impossible for them to remain Jews, and to accompany freely with the rest of the World, as other People do. He also fenced them with a miraculous Protection from the Invasions of their Adversaries, which border'd upon them on every side; so long, I mean, as they were obedient and faithful to God their Protector: for otherwise indeed they were often ravaged by Armies of the Philistines, Ammonites, Assyrians, Babylonians, and other powerful Enemies that were let loose upon them. Which is a sign that they often broke Covenant with God, and thereby rendred themselves obnoxious to the Armies of Aliens, which during their Obedience could never hurt them. For God, to manifest his Power in giving them Peace and Safety, obliged all their Males, their Soldiers not excepted, to go and worship at Jerusalem three times every year, and bid them not be concerned for their Possessions in their absence, for he would not suffer their Enemies to enter any of their Coasts. And this Promise he constantly performed; besides many other instances of his Providence over them, either in diverting their Enemies, when they were arming against them, or destroying them when they were actually among them: Of which the Sacred History affords us many Examples. To which I shall add one of a more modern date: I mean the turn which was given to Alexander's design against the Jews, as it is related by Josephus Antiq. xi. 8. where he tells us, That Alexander the Macedonian, in the course

course of his Wars against the *Persians*, resolved upon the destruction of the *Jews* at *Jerusalem*, because they adhered to their Alliance with the *Persians*. At the same time *Jaddus*, their High-Priest and chief Governor, was warned of God in a dream, to go out with the rest of the Priests, all drest in their proper Habits, and meet the *Macedonians*; which accordingly they did. *Alexander*, as soon as he came within full view of them, stept forth from his Army, and prostrated himself at the High-Priest's feet. At which when his Friends were amazed, and demanded the reason of it, he assured them, that a Person, with just such Features and Dress as *Jaddus*, had appeared to him in a Vision, at the beginning of his Wars, and told him he should succeed and become Master of the Empire of *Persia*. And this turn'd him from his hostile Resolutions, to treat the *Jews* with the kindest Affection, and offer them all the favours which he could do for them. This their deliverance was plainly supernatural, and the effect of God's watchful Providence over them.

THERE is therefore no absurdity in our Prophet, when chap. xx. 6. he calls *Canaan* an Island. For though it lay upon the Continent, yet was it safer from Invasions, by the protection of the Almighty, than if it had been begirt by any Sea, as a Wall about it.

5thly, GOD cleared the Soil of this Vineyard from Stones; not indeed in the literal sense; for this Country pretty much abounds with Rocks and Flints, which are so far from being always prejudicial, that they are serviceable, not only for Walls and Buildings, but even for some parts of Agriculture. But this is a proper continuation of the Allegory, that as Stones should be cast out of a Vineyard, so God cast out the *Amorites* and ancient Inhabitants

habitants of *Canaan*, to make room for the Children of *Israel*. And with them he cast out their Idols, made of Wood and Stone, and demolished the Temples dedicated to Idolatry, that his own People might have no stumbling-blocks left in their way, but might be wholly turned to his Service.

6thly, HE planted it with the choicest Vine, the true Religion, and form of Government both Ecclesiastical and Civil, which he had revealed from Heaven. He made excellent provision for the Instruction of his People, and the promulgation of his Will and Pleasure among them. The Tribe of *Levi* and Lineage of the Priests was very numerous, and sufficient to teach *Jacob* God's Judgments, and *Israel* his Laws; and besides these, he spake to them in extraordinary cases, by a Voice from Heaven, or by the Mouth of his Holy Prophets. And he enforced the observance of his Laws with very considerable Rewards and Punishments. Capital Executions were speedily to be done upon all such as blasphemed God, or went about to pervert others from his Worship. Great Revenues were settled for the maintenance of it, amounting in Tythes and all kind of Offerings, to little less than a fifth part of the product of that rich Country. All the Habits, Furniture, and appendages of this Religion, were of the richest and best Materials, to add the greater Lustre to its Holiness, and excite Men to the greater reverence of the divine Majesty.

JUSTLY therefore does the Prophet affirm, *that God planted his Vineyard with the choicest Vine*; he did not communicate himself to other Nations, *neither had the Heathen knowledge of his Laws*.

BRIEFLY, the *Tower* and *Wine-press* which God set up in the midst of this Vineyard, were the *Temple* and *Altar* which he erected for the Devotions of his People; for after much cultivation of his Vine-
yard

yard and choice of his Vine, he justly expected a plentiful product of the best kind of Grapes; but was recompensed for all his cost and pains with no better than the fower Fruits of wild, uncultivated Nature; *Grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrah*, as he complains, *Deut. xxxii.* And he gives us a sample and taste of them in some of the following Words.

HE looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. The great increase of their Fields and Flocks wherewith he had blessed them, afforded them sufficient means of rendring those dues to Religion, and Loving-kindness to their Neighbours, especially to the more indigent sort, which by many sacred Laws and serious Exhortations he had enjoined them.

BUT instead of being led by the divine beneficence to works of Liberality and Charity, they only studied how to sacrifice to their insatiable Lusts and lewd Affections.

SOME were possessed with the fiend of Covetousness, and were continually encroaching upon the rights of their Neighbours, to engross all to themselves, *joyning House to House, and Field to Field*, till there was no room left for others to dwell near them, that they might be placed alone in the midst of the Earth, and command far and wide round about them.

OTHERS consumed all upon their Bellies, and wallowed in all manner of Sensuality: *They were mighty to drink Wine, they rose up early to follow strong Drink, and continued at it till Night, till they were enflamed and quite infatuated by it, and the Harp and the Viol were in their Feasts*, that thereby they might banish all serious thoughts, and have no regard for the Works of God, nor the Operations of his Hands, no reflection upon the Affronts they were offering him in his own Blessings, and how much they dishonoured both themselves and their Maker by these Abuses.

A third

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A third sort were ambitious of preheminance and superiority in all places of Government, and Seats of Judicature. For the obtaining of which they made great ostentation of their Parts and Abilities: *they were wise in their own Eyes, and prudent in their own Sight.* And thinking that if they kept within the bounds of Truth and Honesty, they should lose the advantages of a crafty subtile Wit, which they took to be the great Talent of Politicians, they made bold to invert the Order which God had settled in things, and painted in such Colours as to make Evil pass for Good, and Good for Evil, Light for Darkness, and Darkness for Light, Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter. And though they could not persuade all Men to renounce common Sense, and be of their Minds; yet they would so argue and reason, and pour out their words with such an air of seriousness and gravity, as caused many to admire them, and become their Proselytes.

Now these covetous, lewd, ambitious Men, abounding in number, as the Prophet complains, filled all places with the fruits of their Unrighteousness. As for the Tythes and Offerings dedicated to Religion, they thought it no robbery to detain them, as *Malachi* complains. If they had occasion for the labour of poor Men, if they had any Trust to manage for the Fatherless and Widow, if they were to buy or sell any thing, whatever commerce or dealing they had with others, they made no scruple to oppress and circumvent, by all ways and means, by lying, and perjury, and perverting of Justice and Judgment, and taking away the lives of the innocent, if they could do it to advantage; and all this to make provision for their Lusts, and feed their lewd Affections. *They justify the wicked for reward, says our Prophet, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him.*

AND

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AND to harden themselves in their wicked Practices, they resolved to be Infidels in all divine Matters; and when the Prophet told them, they were making work for the Judgments of God, and raising an Army of Chaldeans and Babylonians against their Country, *Well, said they, when these things come to pass, we will believe you. Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the Counsel of the Holy one of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it.*

SUCH were the Manners of the Jews for many Years before their Captivity, particularly at this time when *Isaiah* prophesied. And therefore with good reason God tells them, and appeals to themselves for the justice of it, that he would take away the hedge of his Vineyard, and lay it open to be wasted and trodden under Foot. *And it shall not be pruned nor digged, but bring forth Briars and Thorns; and I will command the Clouds, that they rain no Rain upon it.* — ‘And because you have abused your Plenty, by Covetousness and Luxury, I will punish you in that wherein you have offended; your great and fair Houses shall stand empty and without Inhabitant; ten Acres of the Vineyard shall yield but one Bath, *i. e.* a Gallon of Wine for an Acre of Ground; and the Seed of an Homer shall yield an Ephah, which is no more than the tenth part of what was sown; to correct your sacrilegious Covetousness in refusing to give me my Tythes and Offerings.’

AND whereas you challenge me to make good my threatening, in sending victorious Armies to over-run you, *I will but hiss to the Nations, that is, give them but a slight signal, and they shall come swiftly from the ends of the Earth.* None shall be weary, nor stumble among them: none shall slumber nor sleep, neither shall the girdle of their loyns be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken.

AND

AND thus I have shown in what a special manner God blessed his People *Israel* with all Blessings, Spiritual and Temporal, how they abused his Gifts, and turned his grace into Wantonness; how he threatned to visit their sins with his Judgments; and the Issue and Execution of his Threatnings we all know.

THE proper application of all this to our selves, is briefly hinted by St. Paul, *Rom. xi. 2. if God spared not the natural Branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.* We who succeed them in the spiritual Vineyard, the Church of the true God, have no reason to flatter our selves, that our bad Fruits shall be more indulged than theirs. But rather the Judgments which have befallen them, will make our disobedience the more inexcusable, if we commit the same Sins, and are not afraid of the same Punishments.

THAT which ripened them for Destruction was, that they crucified the Son of God, when he came to demand of them the Fruits of his Vineyard. For which reason he hath cast them out, and placed us in their room, to the Intent that *we might render him his fruits in due season.* Let us not prove as unjust, rebellious Servants as they were: *let us not crucify the Son of God afresh,* by blaspheming his Person, or despising his Ordinances: But let us make a worthy and thankful use of the Means of Grace which he vouchsafes us, reverently attending upon his holy Word and Sacraments, that we may be filled with the Fruits of his Spirit, and finally may be transplanted hence by a blessed Resurrection and glorious Ascension into his heavenly Kingdom, where we shall for ever enjoy the Fruits of our Obedience, even the Salvation of our Souls, through his Merits who *is the true Vine, and we are the Branches,* and because he liveth, we shall live also. To him with &c.



SERMON LI.

On the Third Sunday in ADVENT.



ISAIAH xxv. i.

*O Lord thou art my God, I will exalt thee,
I will praise thy Name: for thou hast done
wonderful Things; thy Counsels of old are
Faithfulness and Truth.*

N the foregoing Chapter the Prophet recapitulates, and gives us a summary Account of the Judgments which he had been denouncing against the Land of *Israel* and *Judah*, and all the neighbouring Countries of *Egypt*, *Moab*, *Assyria* and *Babylon*: Now here, chap. xxv. xxvi. he celebrates the Faithfulness and Veracity of God, manifested in the Execution of his threatned Judgments, and praises him for dissolving his ancient Church of degenerate *Jews* in such a manner as conduced to multiply the Number of the true *Israelites*, and bring in the Fulness of the *Gentiles*, whose Benefits in Christ he briefly surveys and commemorates.

And

And 1st, HE glorifies God for demonstrating and sealing the Truth of his ancient Revelations by visible Facts, by the things which he had then done, and still was about to do.

THY Counsels of old are Faithfulness and Truth. These Counsels do, in the general intimate that God will bless the Righteous, and fill the Wicked with Calamities, which are the Fruits of their own Ways: but in a more special manner they contain Admonitions to the People of *Israel*, to expect the flourishing State or Decay of their Nation and Cities, according to the measure of their Obedience or Contempt of the Law which God had given them. These national Admonitions occur frequently in the Book of *Deuteronomy*, but most expressly chap. xxviii. where, among many other things, they are threatened, in case of Disobedience, with the Arms of a strange and fierce Nation, who should devour all their Goods, and besiege them so straitly, that Parents, for very hunger through the straitness of the Siege, should eat the Flesh of their own Children.

Now *Isaiah* lived in that Age, when *Salmaneser* King of *Assyria* dissolved the Kingdom of *Israel*, demolished their Metropolis *Samaria*, and carried away their Tribes into Captivity. To this Event we may justly presume our Prophet had an Eye, when he says, *Thou hast made of a City an Heap, of a defended City a Ruin, a Palace of Strangers, to be no City, it shall never be built*; as indeed it never was with any thing of its ancient Strength and Splendor.

AND but little before *Isaiah's* time it was, that *Benhadad* the Syrian besieged *Samaria*, so long and so closely, that he caused a dreadful Famine in it, such as was never heard of before: and then it was that a Woman did dress and eat her own Child, as you read 2 *Kings* vi. and so literally fulfilled the

threatening I just now mentioned from *Deut. xxviii.* which was in like manner fulfilled a second time in the Siege of *Jerusalem* by the *Romans*, as *Josephus*, who was personally concerned in it, assures us.

AND though *Jerusalem*, at the time of this Prophecy, was miraculously delivered from the Army of *Sennacherib*, when they were just ready to invest it, yet they destroyed many other Cities of *Judea*, as our Prophet, who saw this Invasion, and inserted the History of it in this very Book, has informed us. And therefore he had reason to observe, that God had fulfilled his Counsels of old, by laying more Cities than one in ruinous Heaps.

WE must likewise remember the Title of this Prophecy: it is the *Vision of Isaiah*, wherein, by the Illumination of the divine Spirit, he foresaw many things, which did not come to pass in his days. By virtue of this Light he foretold *Hezekiah*, that his Grand-sons should be Servants in the King of *Babylon's* Court. By the same he saw them restored to their Country through the Favour of *Cyrus the Persian*. By the same Light he saw the last Captivity of the *Jews*, and their Dispersion in our and other Nations of the World, which endures to this day. And finally, in this Vision he saw the coming of the Messiah, and the planting of the *Gentiles* in his Church, and the present and future Benefits of their calling, according to that ancient Oracle of God, that *in him all the Nations of the Earth should be blessed*.

I confess there is a Title in the *Arabick* Version of this Prophet, placed like the Contents over our Chapters, which calls this and the two following Chapters, *King Hezekiah's Thanksgiving to God for the Victory which he had obtained*, I suppose he means over *Sennacherib*, though that is not exprest; and it cannot be denied but several Passages here would

suit

quit well with such an occasion: But because there is no such Title in the original *Hebrew*, nor in any other Version which I have seen, it must pass either for an oral Tradition handed down to us by that Interpreter, or else for his own private Opinion; but I think the first is the more probable Conjecture.

THERE are moreover several Sayings of the Prophet here, which are Truths of an universal Latitude, and not restrained by any special Circumstances of Time or Place.

FOR instance; God is always the *Strength* of his poor distressed Servants, their *Refuge* from a Storm, their *Shadow* from the Heat, *when the Blast of the terrible ones beats against them*. Not that he always vouchsafes them temporal Deliverances; but that he is always able to deliver them; and whenever they are delivered, it is by his Assistance. He can as easily bring down the Noise and abate the Insolence of a Torrent of prevailing Enemies, as he can raise a Cloud to overshadow and rain upon a Ground that is parched with the Heat of the Sun.

IT is likewise an universal Truth, that the Salvation of God is the best Fortification of a City, and makes it more impregnable than Walls and Bulwarks. That he is the proper Ground and Object of our Affiance throughout all Ages, because in him there is everlasting Strength, not liable like ours, to be any ways impaired or exhausted.

THAT he will keep them in perfect Peace, whose Minds are staid on him. That therefore it is our best Policy to walk in the way of Uprightness, because he is most upright, and weighs the Paths of the Just, and is ever mindful of those, whose Soul hath a Desire to his Name, and to the Remembrance of him.

It is, 3dly, too common a Practice for us to give other Lords the Dominion over us, to make Silver and Gold, Wood and Stone, the Work of Men's Hands, our Masters; to put our trust in Riches, or place our chief Dependance upon human Aids and Assistance; to follow the evil Fashions and Customs of the World, or be more at the Command of sinful Affections, than of the sacred Laws and Counsels of God.

LASTLY, it is a general Corruption in People of all Ages, to abuse both the Mercies and Judgments of God. They are very loth to see his Hand, when it is lifted up to chastise them; commonly imputing the Judgments which he sends upon the Earth to meer Fortune and Chance. And if Trouble constrain them to pour out a Prayer, and to vow better Obedience for the time to come, yet they are commonly no longer pious, than while they are under the lash; when Deliverance is vouchsafed them, their Righteousness vanishes, they break Faith with God, and make no farther Application to his Majesty.

THESE are the usual Fruits of our corrupt Nature; and might very probably abound in *Jerusalem* in the days of *Hozekiah* and *Isaiab*. The Prayers of this righteous King, and holy Prophet, with the Piety of some few good People besides, prevailed with God to deliver *Jerusalem* at that time from the hand of the *Assyrians*.

THOUGH I must not forget to mention the Blasphemies of the Enemy as one ground of this Dispensation; to which *Hozekiah* alludes, if this were his Form of Thanksgiving, when he glorifies God, ver. 5. for bringing down the Noise of Strangers, meaning that Message of Defiance which *Rabshakeb* uttered against *Jerusalem* in his Master's Name, and was answered by *Isaiab* from the Mouth of God with a Sentence upon the proud *Assyrian*, which

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which was immediately accomplished in his Destruction. But this surprizing Mercy did not reform the main Body of the *Jews*: their Corruptions quickly broke out again, and their Provocations grew as flagrant as ever, which finally dissolved their Government, and carried them into Captivity.

HAVING thus briefly noted the general Sayings of the Prophet in this Chapter, I proceed now to consider those which I take to be limited to the Times of the Messiah.

1st THEN he says, *That in this Mountain, i. e. in Jerusalem, which was built upon Mount Moriah, the Lord shall make unto all people a feast of fat things.* This Feast, says the *Chaldee Paraphrast*, the People shall take to be for their Honour, but it shall turn to their Reproach; and subject them to such disasters as they shall not escape, but perish in them. If by the *People*, this Interpreter had meant his own People the *Jews*, he had come nearer the sense of the Text; but he points his threatening at the *Gentiles*, commonly called *People* in the Sacred style, that they shall have no Joy of this Feast.

Now this looks like a very strained sense, and contrary to this Prophet's real intention, who in his Vision often foresaw great blessings that should accrue to the *Gentiles* by the coming of the *Messiah*. And it likewise crosses the natural import of the words. For a Feast naturally affords joy and gladness to those that partake of it; and this is described as consisting of the choicest Provisions; and the Lord who makes it, hath so much sincere goodness in his Invitation, as to gratifie and not abuse the Guests whom he entertains at it. But how is it credible that all Nations of the Earth should be feasted at *Jerusalem*? How can this consist with any probability? This seems not

possible to be reconciled any other way than in our Christian sense, that the words are to be spiritually understood of the Graces of God exhibited to mankind in Christ Jesus. And they correspond very well with that Parable *Matt. xxii.* where Christ himself compares *the Kingdom of Heaven, i. e. the reign of the Messiah, to a Feast which a King prepared for the Marriage of his Son.* To which when they who were first invited, meaning the *Jews*, refused to come, he sent forth his Servants, his Ministers, to bring in all sorts of People, whoever they could find, to partake of this entertainment. There can be no question but the moral of this similitude is the heavenly food of the Soul, which is dispensed indifferently to all Nations by the preaching of the Gospel, according to the unlimited Commission which our Lord gave to his Apostles. And forasmuch as this work was begun at *Sion*, and this worship at *Jerusalem*, therefore all Nations are said by the Prophet to be feasted there, because that is the place from whence they derive this Bread of Life.

THIS Interpretation clears up the sense, and solves all the difficulties, not only of these, but the following words of the Prophet. *God will destroy in this Mountain the face of the covering cast over all People, and the vail that is spread over all Nations.* What can this *vail* and this *covering* mean? A Christian Interpreter easily resolves us: That *Vail* of Separation which was drawn of old between *Jew* and *Gentile* by the Ceremonial Law: that *Covering* of Ignorance which was spread over the Nations, and kept them from the knowledge of the true God. Both these are taken away by the coming of Christ: With him no man is *common* or *unclean* upon the account of his Nation or Parentage, but he has enlarged the fold of his Church, so as to comprehend all People, *Jews* and *Gentiles*

In one flock, and having filled the Earth with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the Sea, all People are or may be delivered from dumb Idols, and worship God in Spirit and in Truth. The beams of the Sun of Righteousness are sufficient to expell the darkness of Error and Superstition.

THE Prophet proceeds to another benefit of this dispensation, that *Death should be swallow'd up in Victory, and Tears wiped away from all Faces.* Which he repeats and confirms in the next Chapter, where he introduces the *Messiah* addressing his Church in these words: *Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise: Awake and sing ye that dwell in dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the Earth shall cast out her dead.* The Jews themselves apply this to the *Messiah* and his Kingdom, but they deceive themselves in imagining that the accomplishment of it was to be at his first coming. It was indeed then begun, by the raising of his own dead Body, and several others, out of the Grave; but it shall not be consummated till the great Harvest of the World at his second appearing, *when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth: then, and not till then, shall be fulfilled the Prophecies here before us, Death is swallowed up in victory, and Tears are wiped away from all Faces. And in that day men shall say; Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoyce in his Salvation.* This is the triumph of Christ's faithful Servants, who have constantly maintained his Honour and Worship in this present Life, against all the opposition of wicked men and Devils; when they shall see him coming in the Clouds with Power and great Glory, to receive them to himself, it will transport them, as it justly may, with an ecstasie of gladness, and they shall

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shall cry out before all the gazing Spectators, *This is our God, whom we have depended upon for the Salvation which he promised us.*

AND he shall spread forth his Hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his Hands to swim. This is a lively resemblance of Christ stretcht out upon the Cross; the figure which a man strikes with his hands in swimming represents the posture of Crucifixion very exactly. Now it has been the opinion of some holy men of old, that our Lord will usher in his second appearing with the sign of the Cross, both for the Confusion of his Enemies, whose Pride he will humble very low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust, as our Prophet here speaks; and for the Consolation of all his Servants, who have not been ashamed of the Cross of Christ. This is an ancient Opinion; and truly it is well countenanced by this passage of *Isaiah*. And there is a very fitting congruity in it, viz. to show, that the Victory which our Lord obtained over Death and the Grave, and all the Powers of Darkness, was begun and ended by his sufferings on the Cross.

AND thus by the help of the Prophet's Vision in this chapter, we have had a glimpse of the Blessings convey'd to us by the coming of Jesus Christ, so far as his Words have given us occasion to consider them.

AND the consideration of them should excite us to emulate our Prophet in the words of my Text, to esteem them as wonderful things, and to praise and magnifie God for them.

IN this Relation which our Lord hath contracted with us, he hath exceedingly honoured us, and became the son of Man, that we might be made the sons of God. He hath stript us of the poor weeds of our sinful Mortality, and cloathed

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us with the Robes of his own Righteousness. He is our Resurrection and our Life.

THIS ministers strong consolation to the Christian of hard fortune and circumstances in this World, when the blast of the Mighty beats like a Storm upon him in haughty disdain and contempt of him for his Indigence. He can comfort himself, if he be a servant of Christ, that his Lord became poor to make him rich, and that he hath as good a Title as the greatest man upon Earth, to an Inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven, which far exceeds all the Splendor and Felicity which this World can afford.

LET us praise God for feeding us with the pleasures of his House, even of his holy Temple, where we may buy Wine and Milk without Money and without Price; I mean those holy Ordinances, Sacraments, Prayers, and Praises, which fill the Souls of the Righteous as it were with marrow and fatness. For they that hunger and thirst after Righteousness shall be so filled. Man shall not live by bread alone; he who can relish nothing but what springs out of the Earth, deserves not the name of a Man, but is of a Constitution wholly like the Beast which perisheth. He that is of the Earth, is earthy; but he that spiritually eateth the flesh of the Son of Man, and drinketh his blood, is nourished to eternal Life, and shall be raised to a happy Immortality at the last day.

BLESSED be our Lord, who hath taken away the Vail of our Ignorance, and turned us from dumb Idols to serve the living God, whom the World with all their wisdom never knew; and therefore Jesus Christ is justly styled the Wisdom of the Father, because he alone has made him known to the World, and composed such a System of sound Religion, holiness and pureness of living, as upbraids

braids all the sects of Philosophers with Ignorance and Error. This the wisest of them were aware of, as soon as the Gospel began to be preached, and left their beggarly Elements for the profession of it, and with St. *Paul* they counted all their former studies and attainments but time lost and thrown away, in comparison of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

AND blessed be his holy Name, that he will one day swallow up Death in victory, and wipe away the tears from the faces of all his Servants, and take away their reproach from the Earth. It is a handle to the wicked to reproach the Servants of God, that they live under the dominion of Death. *Job's* Wife reviled him with his service, because being eminently religious, he suffered great Calamities. The *Jews* insulted our Lord himself, when he hung upon the Cross, as forsaken of God. *Let God deliver him*, said they, *if he owns him for his Son; let him come down from the Cross, and we will believe in him.* Thus sanguinary Persecutors have commonly reproached holy Martyrs under their Sufferings, that their Cause was bad, because their Master did not interpose for their Deliverance.

Now this Reproach is in some measure taken away already by the Resurrection of our Lord; but it cannot be wholly confuted and silenced, till the Resurrection of all his Saints. Death indeed has already received some wounds by a few Resurrections that are past; but then it will be wholly swallowed up in Victory. It exercises its Tyranny at present, in manifold Calamities of our outward Estate, in various diseases of the Body, and anxieties of Mind, which humble the stoutest men alive, and draw tears and groans from the most refined Saints upon Earth.

BUT

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BUT the time is coming when there shall be a death of this Death, an end of this King of Terrors dominion over the Saints of God; whom he shall not be able to approach or touch with the least pain or grief imaginable. He shall be shut up in the bottomless Pit with the reprobate Spirits, while the Righteous shall shine in the immortal Kingdom of their Heavenly Lord, where all Tears shall be wiped away from their Eyes, and there shall be no curse, no darkness, no anguish nor pain; even the remembrance and ideas of these things shall be quite obliterated.

BLESSED be God for providing such a happy state for us. Every pain and grief which we feel, ought to recommend the Mercy of this gracious Provision; and our apprehensions of it now by Faith, should much alleviate the sufferings of this present Life, *and make our Yoke easie and our Burden light*, in a near view of the perfect fruition and possession which we shall certainly have of it, through the Merits and Mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom &c.



SERMON



SERMON LI.

On the Fourth Sunday in ADVENT.



ISAIAH xxx. 7.

For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: Therefore have I cryed concerning this; their strength is to sit still.

N the History of the Kings of *Israel* and *Judah* we read, that upon several occasions, when they were distressed by the *Assyrians* and other invading Enemies, they fortified themselves against them by making an Alliance with the *Egyptians*. Particularly we are told that two such Alliances happened in the time of the Prophet *Isaiab*. The first was between *Hoshea* King of *Israel*, and *So*, otherwise called *Sabacon* King of *Egypt*; the *Israelite* hoping by the assistance of this *Egyptian* to shake off the Yoke of the *Assyrian*; in confidence hereof he withdrew

drew his Subjection from *Salmaneser* King of *Assyria*, and would pay him no more Tribute, as he had formerly done. Whereupon the *Assyrian* marched with an Army against *Hoshea*, and having subdued all the Country round about, pent him up in *Samaria*, and there besieged him three Years, at the end of which he took the City, put *Hoshea* in Chains, and carried the People into Captivity.

THE second Alliance was between *Hezekiah* King of *Judah*, and *Sevechus*, Son of the said *Sabacón*, King of *Egypt*, upon occasion of *Sennacherib's* Invasion of *Judea*. *Sevechus* for his own part was no military Man; but he engaged his Kinsman and Neighbour, *Tirbakab* King of *Ethiopia*, to lead the Army, consisting of part *Ethiopians*, and part *Egyptians*, against *Sennacherib*; of him we read *2 Kings* xix. But *Isaiab* had prophesied before, *cap. xx.* that *Egypt* and *Ethiopia* should be punished by the *Assyrians*, and accordingly they were overthrown in this Battle.

NOW the advantages which the *Jews* promised themselves from their Alliance with *Egypt*, were these. The *Egyptians* abounded in Chariots and Horses, which the *Jews* were destitute of. For *Palestine* being a Country full of steep Hills, and narrow difficult Ways, was in many places unpassable by Horses, and therefore their Beasts of burden were Camels, Asses and Mules, which are not apt to start, but tread sure in side-long dangerous ways. These served them very commodiously in times of Peace. But when they were invaded by Armies of the *Assyrians* and *Chaldeans*, who had Troops of Horse, and multitudes of Chariots, they wanted the like Forces to oppose them; and such the *Egyptians* could very well supply them with.

BESIDES, the *Assyrians* and *Chaldeans* were at that time the most formidable Powers of the East, ambitious of universal Monarchy, and threatening to

to subdue *Egypt* as well as other rich Kingdoms. On which account the *Egyptians* were jealous of them, and therefore were more easily prevailed upon, and more cheaply engaged to assist the *Jews*, or any other People in their Wars against them.

BUT these Alliances were displeasing to God, as he declares by the Prophet in my Text, and at the beginning of this Chapter, *Wo, says he, to the rebellious Children, which go down into Egypt without consulting me, to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt. Therefore the strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame, and your trust in the shadow of Egypt, your confusion.* As indeed it proved in the case of *Hoshea*, who was brought to ruin by his dependence on them; and how unserviceable they were in their Alliance with *Judah* against *Sennacherib*, we have seen before.

THE reasons why God prohibited his People to confederate with the *Egyptians*, are these that follow.

1st, BECAUSE he had delivered their Forefathers out of the Land of *Egypt* with a mighty Hand, stretched out from Heaven, and unassisted by any human Means. He had manifested himself to be far above all their Gods, in that he triumphed over them in the ten Plagues, and drowned their King and Army in the Red Sea. Notwithstanding all which sufficient Convictions, the *Egyptians* still persisted in their gross Idolatry; which might justly provoke God to forbid his People any commerce or dealing with them.

2. THEIR applying to *Egypt* for aid against their Enemies, was derogatory to the honour of God, who having anciently demonstrated his ability to save his People, and having promised still to vouchsafe them his Protection in proportion to their Obedience; these Idolaters might be apt to conclude, that his former power was now decayed, and that their
Gods

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Gods had gained the ascendant over him, since they were called in to the protection of his People.

3. A *N Egyptian* had proved fatal to *Israel* in their happiest State; I mean the Daughter of an *Egyptian* King, who was one of the Wives of King *Solomon*, and helped with other strange Women to entice him to Idolatry. The immediate consequence of which, by the just Judgment of God, was the Division of the twelve Tribes into two Kingdoms, who often waged unnatural Wars one with another. This greatest of Calamities was hastened by an *Egyptian* Alliance; and therefore such Alliances are properly stigmatized by our Prophet with a Woe.

4. GOD had in general forbidden his People to make Confederacies with any of the Nations round about them, lest they should defile themselves with their idolatrous Principles, and abominable Practices; or *lest they should put their trust in Man, and make flesh their Arm, and in their Heart depart from the Lord.* For he had undertaken, by virtue of his sole divine Power, to defend and preserve them against all their Enemies, so long as they continued to be his faithful and loyal People.

THIS was the prime Article of his Covenant with them, and therefore when they chose a Man to be King over them, though he was one of their Brethren, a Worshipper of the same God, and subject to the same divine Laws with themselves; yet God resented it, as Rebellion against himself, intimating that by this change of Government, which they had rashly made, without consulting him, they had, as far as they could, rejected and deposed him from reigning over them. This is what he charges upon them in this and the next Chapter, that by strengthening themselves with human Alliances, they sought to be independent upon God, and hoped to find out a way for their deliverance from the

Sword of their Enemies, without returning to their allegiance to God their King. They could not but know that, so long as they walked in the Law of the Lord their God, he would fight for them against all their Enemies, that none should be able to prevail over them. And they knew, that when they fell into the Adversaries hand, it was for their Sins. But they had no mind to reform; their great concern was, how to be impious with impunity; to remove the Judgment without quitting the Sin. And therefore when the Armies of Aliens rose against them, they were full of Embassies and Treaties of Alliance; they sought the defence of many Chariots and strong Horsemen; *but they looked not to the holy one of Israel, neither sought the Lord.* They were so far from seeking him, that they would not endure such Teachers as preached his sincere and uncorrupt word among them. For, according to the following charge of our Prophet, *they said to the Seers, See not, and to the Prophets, Prophecie not unto us right things; speak unto us smooth things, prophecie deceits. Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path; cause the holy one of Israel to cease from before us.*

WE can hardly think that this People were so abandoned and lost to all sense of Shame, as to say these things to their spiritual Guides in such direct and plain Terms as are here set down. But we know how they said it as effectually by their Actions. They conferred all their favours upon such Prophets, as took care to say nothing that was displeasing, or contrary to the prevailing Politicks of their Times, but represented God as favourable to their Designs, when he was utterly against them; *and cried, Peace, Peace, when there was no Peace.* These Prophets they esteemed as honest, well-affected Men, who were heartily in the interest of their Country. These they raised to their places of Trust and Profit, and admitted them to the intimacy of Friends
and

and Counsellors. But the plain-dealing Preachers, who spoke to them the Word of the Lord without reserve or disguise, were the objects of their hatred and averſion, kept down from the rewards and encouragements of their Profession, and removed out of the way, into Prisons and Banishment, if they presumed to declaim againſt the reigning Sins of the Times. Something of this treatment was the common portion of ſuch Servants of God, as the Author of my Text. *I hate Micaiah, ſaid Abab, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil,* 1 Kings xxii. and he ſent him to live upon Bread and Water in a Prison, for publishing a bold, ungrateful Truth. By this kind of treatment, Princes and People ſaid in effect to the true Prophets, *Prophesie not unto us right things; but ſpeak ſmoothly, and prophesie Deteits;* and this no doubt was the meaning of *Iſaiah* in the paſſage here before us.

THE design of the Prophet is, to correct the Errors of two ſorts of People.

1. OF thoſe Politicians, who promiſe themſelves a prosperous Iſſue of their Affairs, while their ways are diſpleaſing to God, and they are not careful to reconcile themſelves to him, by ſuitable acts of Religion, ſo as to obtain his favour and bleſſing upon them.

2. OF thoſe who will not receive the divine Word according to its true and genuine Meaning, but only in ſuch a light as is moſt favourable to their carnal Interests and corrupt Affections.

AND, I ſe, Men of the beſt capacity and addreſs for great Affairs, will never be able to bring them to a good Iſſue, without due acknowledgments of the Power of God, and applications to him, for his help and aſſiſtance; without which they had better ſit ſtill, as the Prophet here ſpeaks, and not put their hand to any Undertaking.

ONE would think it were needleſs to inſiſt on this Doctrine, *That God is the ſupreme Moderator and Go-*

vernour of all things. But there are two reasons which make it pertinent enough at all times. One is, the Spirit of Mankind, which is generally alienated from God, and always trying to live without him in the World. The other is, that one and the same event often happens to the Righteous, and to the Wicked, to him who prayeth, and to him that blasphemeth; to him that sweareth, and to him that feareth an Oath.

It must be confest, that the greatest part of those who have the conduct of human Affairs, are not much devoted to the worship and service of God. So far as we may judge of men by their works, (and by their works the Gospel allows us to judge of them) we may, without breach of Charity, pronounce of the Councils, Assemblies, and Corporations of men, that they are not commonly acted by the Spirit of God, but often fall into measures, and pursue ends, which are very wide of the Laws of strict Piety and Virtue.

We must likewise acknowledge, that the Administrations of irreligious men many times seem to be crown'd with success, as hath been observed in all Ages. But if we could make exact observations, we should find that they are oftner confounded and defeated. Whenever they prosper, it is for one of these three Reasons following.

1. Either because they preside over others who are better than themselves; for whose service God may prosper them, very consistently with his Honour and Glory; for *he has promised to make all things work together for good to those who love and fear him.* Or 2dly, Because he waits to be gracious to the worst of men, and gives them time and space for Repentance; not willing that any should perish, but that all men should see the errors of their ways, and turn to him. Or 3dly, Because he uses one wicked People as a rod and a scourge

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to punish another. Thus he threatens to set oppressive Rulers over an unworthy People, who had abused his Mercies, that they might execute his Vengeance upon them. Thus he raises up one impious Nation to cut off another by Wars, and then he destroys the Conqueror; as he tells *Sennacherib*, 2 *Kings* xix. 'Tis I who have caused thee
' to lay fenced Cities into ruinous heaps. I dis-
' maid and confounded their Inhabitants, and made
' them as the grass of the field before thee; and
' now because I hear thy rage and tumult against
' me, I will put my hook into thy nose, and my
' bridle into thy lips, and will turn thee back by
' the way by which thou camest.'

So likewise the same Prophets who foretold the Exaltation of *Babylon*, that she should sit as a Queen above the Nations round about her; declare in their Prophecies, that she should be brought down to the dust, when she had fulfilled the judgments of God; because she was not exalted for any worthiness in herself, but only as an Instrument in his hand to execute his Vengeance upon others.

FOR these Reasons wicked men flourish and make a blaze for a time, but we see in the methods of God's Providence, that they are destroyed at the last, as all observing Writers have testified. *The triumphing of the Wicked*, says the Book of Job, *is but for a moment. I have seen the Ungodly*, says the Psalmist, *in great Prosperity, and flourishing like a green Bay tree; but in a short time I beheld, and lo he was gone; I sought him, but his place could no where be found.* And it is the unanimous Voice of Sacred Writers, that though wicked men abound in Riches, and have all the defence of strong Towns, numerous Armies, powerful Alliances, yet they shall not escape unpunished, nor shall their Wisdom or Politicks avail them, so long

long as he who is higher than the highest, is against them.

AND therefore the stoutest and bravest of men, who have been truly wise, have ever begun their weighty Affairs, with seeking the face and favour of God; they have disclaimed all Confidence in Sword and Bow, and human means, which though needful for our Defence and Safe-guard, yet are not able to procure it without the Blessing of God. *For except the Lord keep the City, the Watchman waketh but in vain.*

THIS is what *Isaiah* would teach his People in this Chapter, when he tells them, *the Egyptians shall help you in vain and to no purpose; the strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame, and your trust in his shadow your confusion, while you take Counsel, but not of the Lord, and cover you with a covering, but not of his Spirit.*

2dly, HE would correct the error of those men, who will not receive the divine word according to its true and genuine meaning; but chuse to have it gloss'd and coloured with such a sense as is most favourable to their carnal Interests, and corrupt Affections. How fond the ancient *Jews* were of such Glosses, we have heard; and their Descendents were the Heirs of this infatuation, making the word of God of none effect by their corrupt Traditions and false Comments upon it; for which abuses both Fathers and Children were deservedly punished and carried into Captivity.

NOW this is a strange and sottish kind of Perverseness, to be willing to hear nothing of God's word, but what is soft and pleasing to us. For can we by such Precautions flatter ourselves that we shall escape the effects of his displeasure? Any man may with as good reason stop his ears at the proclamation of a Law, or hire another to read it to him in much softer words than it was pen'd, and then go his way, and live in the avow'd breach of it, without

without apprehending that he shall ever be called to an account, or suffer for it. But this is not the way of the World, nor will such jesting and trifling be endured in human Government. And the absurdity is as great, and the danger far greater, in dealing thus with the Word of God. It is in effect adding to it and taking away from it at our own pleasure; which Practice the same holy Word has prohibited, under the severest Penalties both of the present and future state.

THIS is a point which deserves our most serious regard and attention. For I believe there is not a man, and perhaps there never was, who is possessed with any beloved Error or favourite Lust, or zealously addicted to any Faction or secular Interest, but he makes more or less of the divine Word, just as it may serve his purpose. Men first resolve to do their own will, and abound in their own sense, and then it shall go hard but they will find a way to reconcile it with their duty. We find our own People apt and ready in such kind of Sophistry; and we cannot doubt but the *Jews* here spoken of, were as subtle Casuists in their own concerns. God had, for several good reasons, forbid them to make any league, offensive or defensive, with the *Egyptians*. And this was forbidden them in very plain and positive terms. Yet they broke through this Law several times, and persuaded themselves, no doubt, that there were circumstances and reasons of State which superseded the Obligation of it, and that it was to give way to Necessity, which is the common Plea of all Libertines. But this Plea was the more inexcusable in them, because their Prophets, *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah*, assured them by immediate Revelation, that God constantly exacted their Obedience to this Law. And this People were still more intolerable, in charging these Prophets, as they did, with speaking falsely in the name

of the Lord, since what they declared, was perfectly agreeable to his known and written Will.

THIS shews the desperate state of an obstinate Mind; it will fight against the clearest light of Religion and Reason, and refuses to be persuaded by the most convincing Arguments, and unquestionable word of God himself. It is no uncommon thing to see some People who profess a Zeal for Religion, and place much of it in some singular Opinion; if a man touch their error with a plain argument from Sacred Scripture, how passionate they grow; and though they would seem to value their *Bible* above all things, yet when it is plainly against them, they as plainly declare themselves against it.

THERE is but one way that I know of, to cure this over-weening obstinate Spirit; and that is, to introduce the good Spirit of God in the room of it, whose most eminent fruits are Long-suffering, Meekness, and Humility. For he that has a Heart prepared to do the Will of God, will be watchful over his own carnal Will, lest it get the dominion over him; and he who heartily seeks after that wisdom which is from above, will not be wise in his own conceit. The first lesson of a child of God, is to deny himself, and learn absolute Obedience to his Heavenly Father.

THIS is a great Work, and not to be accomplished without much Prayer, and daily care to bring our Hearts and Minds under the government of God's Law; for which end let us beseech him to work in us both to will and to do those things which are pleasing in his sight; that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also may have Grace and Power constantly to fulfill them; through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.

